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No. of pages transmitted (including this cover) **1+4**

What goes around…etc.

xxxxxx:

Since the three meetings I observed in January (Exec Tm, Leadership Tm, and Board) I've been trying to figure out how to coherently feed back to you the possibilities I saw emerge from them that could be addressed in a way that exactly matched the "agenda" you had sketched on the board for the Exec. Staff. [The *diagonal* line through time that connected early childhood to the new outcome standards.]

And in doing this, I've been trying to take into account both [1] the struggle you're still having finding a way to connect the dots for others - How to really address shared *accountability* and *shared responsibility* as a coherent process." A major concern which you described to Marla in August as an area where you "don't know... and don't have the answer." And [2] the fact that, without that picture, a good portion of your key staff don't yet get the meaning of what you are now demanding from them in terms of "process" data. (And I have anecdotal data to support that).

Now I think I'm going to stop seeking coherence, and send you some of the thoughts in pieces, and let your mind create the coherence…as it always does. One reason for this comes again from the strange *synchronicity* that seems to be influencing our relationship. Here's the latest…and the reason for the attachment.

Yesterday, in my own learning journal I noted that I have been watching *possibilities* being transformed into *probabilities.* The difference being that, in the latter, one had assurance that what *seemed possible,* could produce the results you want in your situation. While most of education for decades has focused on trying to disseminate information about "possibilities" and install pilots that demonstrated what they might look like on the ground, making these "possibilities" into "probabilities" required an entirely different process. One that engaged - experientially - both method and mindset, especially for those whose actions, because they touch the lives of children, can't let go of the old before they have confidence in the new.

Then, about two hours later I picked up the current Education Week, and staring up at me from its back page was **Ending Chance In Classroom Teaching: Reliability in the Achievement of the Basics, by Leon M. Lessinger.** As you'll see, it addresses the exact same issue using a better term "reliability" than my "probability." But that's not the synchronicity I'm referring to at the top of this note re "What goes around..." Leon Lessinger and I share a history that has brought us together at key times and apparently shaped the ways we understand and address the world of schooling because he and I seem to be on the same page today.

When we first met, Leon was superintendent in San Mateo CA, a district that was part of a unique R&D network called *Education System's for the 70's.* The feds had created the network of about 15 school districts, 3 states, and some 20 R&D contractors, and hired a separate management group to coordinate it. I worked there. *ES'70* was quite a learning experience for me and resulted in my first Kappan article: "Linkage Strategies for Change: The *Process* may be the *Product.*"

Leon and I continued to interact as he came to Washington as US commissioner of education for Elementary and Secondary schools, and then as partners in something called the *Education Audit Institute* which proposed to provide for school districts the type of "whole body" scans that MRI do today for people. And, again we learned a lot.

Then I think my last contact was during my time at AASA at a workshop for the Florida DOE on quality and CI processes. Leon, Ed Bales from Motorola and I were the presenters. As I recall, Leon was using a lot of DeBono's creative problem-solving tools in his work.

Now, this article which I think you'll enjoy. *Any italics are his,* **sentences in bold, mine.**

Ending Chance In Classroom Teaching

Reliability in the Achievement of the Basics

By Leon M. Lessinger

Reliability must be a standard expectation in education.

Many states require performance standards and accountability through statewide testing publicly reported. Accountability for performance standards through testing is best thought of as a beginning, not an end. Standards and accountability are powerful conceptual tools that can help educators accomplish the real purpose of education: higher and more widespread student learning. The tools are necessary, but not sufficient. They are two legs of an indispensable three-legged stool. The third leg is *reliability* in classroom teaching.

Reliability is what we can count on getting *every time* and not just by chance. We expect our cars to start every time. We expect airline maintenance to be perfect every time. We expect the physician to prescribe the right treatment every time. We want the bank to give us the right balance every time. Our expectations about service and product dependability are not always met, of course, but when they aren't, we are motivated—sometimes passionately— to try to do something about it. This can become a standard expectation in education.

Many parents now don't expect good teaching every time, or even from time to time. From experience, they know, if only intuitively, that luck or chance can rule in the quality of classroom teaching. Their fear is obvious when parents are interviewed when school opens. Parents worry about the teacher their child will get this time. They know that what a teacher knows and is able to do is the decisive factor in their child's success. **What they may *not* know is that the *management system* the teacher works in is the crucial underwriter of the quality of that classroom teaching.**

There is evidence, relatively easy to observe, of the proof that a tyranny of chance need not rule in the quality of teaching in early elementary school. This tyranny is especially harmful in the crucial early-elementary subjects of reading, writing, mathematics, and study skills.

Here are some examples of the evidence and rationale for reliable classroom teaching:

* When time is allocated for teacher planning, teachers plan their lessons.

* Students know what their teacher expects. This eliminates wasted time and hopeless student confusion.

* Teachers select what to include or ignore. Reliable teachers align teaching to curriculum standards and subject matter.

* Teaching time is what taxpayers pay for with their school tax dollars. Union contracts strictly specify the *minutes of teacher time*. Time is the precious commodity for classroom learning. Once wasted or used poorly, time cannot be recovered.

Even a casual visit to some classrooms easily shows the efficient and effective use of time. Reliable teaching closes the wide variation from one teacher to another in classroom time devoted to subject matter. Reliable teaching is teaching using every minute of the classroom time period effectively and efficiently.

* In reliably taught classrooms, students are not judged to be low performers. Each student is treated as an individual; no students are treated as groups. They are called on as often as others and given the same relative time to answer questions. Reliable teaching avoids labeling.

* Discipline problems are rare in classes where **the teacher has mastered the "take charge of the workplace" process.** Students don't have time to misbehave.

Reliable teaching secures motivation and measurement with real-time feedback and corrective action.

* When student performance is motivated and accomplishments measured, the rate and quality of student performance improve. Reliable teachers have both the skill and desire to motivate and measure adequately. Reliable teaching secures motivation and measurement with real-time feedback and corrective action.

* Reliable teaching is teaching with **a consistent strategy for instruction**. Resources are selected according to that strategy. The teaching avoids vague objectives. Lessons are well-thought-out and well-organized. Classroom work is well-paced. Teachers regularly check to see how well students are doing. If the check shows learning needs, real-time action is taken to serve student-learning needs.

* Reliable teachers ask the question, "What does solid research say really works to achieve quality classroom teaching?" They then **use what works as standard operating practice, just as doctors use the treatments that are known to work to treat an illness.** There is a growing concern on the part of

educators to use what works in classroom teaching practice. This is **a principal source for ending any tyranny of chance in classroom teaching.**

We know the chief characteristics of what in the management world are called high-reliability organizations—those whose products and services we can depend on every time. They communicate a clear mission and achievable goals to their staffs and stakeholders alike, and passionately focus on seeing that these goals are actually achieved. If they are not, corrective action is immediately employed.

In schools, this would mean: All the classrooms teaching a given subject have the same clear objectives and use the "teaching treatments" known to be effective in getting student accomplishment. School staffs show a strong sense of mission in helping *all* students achieve the standards reflected by the objectives. They communicate, honor, and vigorously pursue the achievement of the standards set out for them in their subject fields.

High-reliability-organization schools, moreover, obsess over the quality of their processes and insist on taking steps to constantly improve them, because processes literally make up the heart of the school and the school system.

Building this high-quality reliability into classroom teaching in the early elementary grades begins with the use of good practice as "standard operating practice."

The lack of attention to standard operating practices in classroom teaching is in fact the hallmark of the tyranny of chance. Educators are increasingly rejecting an erroneously held notion that either standard operating practices do not exist for classroom teaching or that *all* teaching is always some kind of uniquely mysterious personal act not subject to control.

High-reliability-organization schools obsess over the quality of their processes and insist on taking steps to constantly improve them.Here are some examples of standard operating processes for reliable-quality classroom teaching: (1) determining the readiness for teaching when children start a class; (2) informing the teachers of previous student performance to build continuity into instruction; and (3) using what dependable research proves works as classroom teaching practice.

The reliable classroom is not like a gambling casino. It is not the place for a game of chance. Teachers in these classrooms do what physicians routinely do: They always fit the proper treatment to the situation. They don't try to invent their own treatment if there is a tested one known through research to be useful.

In classroom teaching of the basics, we can be definitive and authoritative about the required standard operating practices for reliable quality. Careful study over many years has shown that in such classrooms the following takes place:

1. Teachers plan each lesson to support the achievement of state and school system standards, as part of an overall school plan for the school term.

2. Teachers communicate the lesson goals and objectives to the children and their parents.

3. Teachers maintain consistency with the teachers in the same school in choosing subject matter to be taught.

4. Teachers use classroom time for subject matter effectively and efficiently.

5. Teachers avoid labeling and stereotyping groups of students.

6. Teachers use as standard teaching practice the valid and effective teaching methods demonstrated through solid research that has been field-tested.

7. Teachers pace and sequence the student work properly (the basic processes of any lesson).

8. Teachers practice the standard operating practices of good management of student discipline.

9. Teachers motivate and evaluate the students using methods that are both valid and reliable.

10. **Teachers use quality control (feedback and corrective action) in classroom instruction in real time, and not from time to time.**

Leaders of high-reliability organizations do not fear exposing what isn't working, because the fundamental mind-set behind every such organization is continuous improvement. A problem found is never an admission of failure; it is an opportunity for inventing and deploying corrective action aimed at making an inadequate process work better. Furthermore, if the corrective action employed doesn't work, another corrective action is taken. This, too, is increasingly a goal of school leadership.

There is a set of principles followed by all high-reliability organizations that is being incorporated into schools. Such schools, for example, do the following:

* **Routinely analyze all systems and their processes—classroom instruction, parent communication, transportation, assessment, logistical support, and so forth—for discrepancy, making decisions for improvement based on fact.**

* Consciously define the organization's internal and external customers, actively seeking input from both.

* Drive out fear by encouraging the organization's members to risk making mistakes in order to learn more about the system.

* Remove sole reliance on top-down command-and-control barriers by establishing clear and open lines of two-way communication.

* Educate and retrain teachers and staff members on a scheduled basis.

* **Thrive on fostering teamwork and interrelationships.**

Many schools are moving skillfully to become the kinds of "high- reliability classroom-teaching organizations" I suggest. They are doing it by using the insights and procedures of two authoritative quality-improvement systems: the ISO 9000 Criteria (quality standards adopted in 1987 by the International Organization for Standardization) and the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Criteria. Together, these quality-management guidelines may provide schools with a winning prescription to heal the chronic disease of unreliable quality in classroom teaching.

The Baldrige criteria raise the basic question-and-answer patterns; the ISO 9000 standards instruct **bottom-up solutions,** through a set of processes for describIng the treatments and the follow-through of their productiveness. The ISO process for every regimen tells school staff members to: say what they do for every key system process, write it down so that others may review it, do what they have written, measure effectiveness, take corrective action, and continually review the same treatment on a regular schedule to keep making improvements.

Leaders of high-reliability organizations do not fear exposing what isn't working. These criteria **challenge school leadership to develop a quality policy for** operational as well as **teaching processes.** Applying such a prescription will require constant attention to the how of school processes. It means asking probing questions. Answers will need to flow freely. They will need to describe successive activities, as well as comfortably discuss the tools, techniques, and methods being used during the schooling process.

The winning prescription, then, is a survey of processes intended to motivate, plan, and assure classroom reliability.

Such attention to processes leads directly to continuous improvement. By its very nature, a process problem is never permanently solved. These problems either become ingrained bad habits leading to further decline, or become consciously improved.

Once fully committed to this winning prescription, a school's staff members pull away from the notion of playing only the role of *inspectors*. They evolve into system designers as well as excellent practitioners. They seek constantly to improve systems that will achieve what their leaders as well as their "customers"—their students and stakeholders—both require and deserve.

Leon M. Lessinger, the associate U.S. commissioner of education for elementary and secondary schools under Presidents Johnson and Nixon, is a clinical psychologist living in Pine Grove, Calif. He is a former dean of education at the University of South Carolina, has taught in both public schools and universities, and has served as the superintendent of three school systems. His books include Healing Public Schools (Scarecrow Press, 2001), written with Allen Salowe.

 Vol. 21, number 20, page 56,36