

It's Time for Genuine Reform

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The crisis in education is not a recent aberration. Simply doing a better job of what schools have been attempting to do all along will not extract the system from crisis. The crisis is a systems problem and, as such, renders fruitless even the most valiant effort toward improvement by modifying or changing specific practices.

The concerns about education are not unfounded. Few, if any teachers, would report that their students learn and master all of the objectives in the district curriculum manuals. Few would argue that the existing curriculum serves the needs of their learners. Why, then, do we continue to tinker with the existing system, rather than promote true system-wide change? The answer lies in the traditional approach of management of the schools.

Most public schools continue to operate under the factory model. They are designed for students to move through the system at the same rate. Those who do not drop out physically, do so mentally, by passively accepting what is offered and meeting minimal expectations to move through the system. Teachers work at separate stations within the factory, teaching content-driven curriculum that is seldom connected with other subject areas and rarely designed to meet the needs of the learner. Teachers become the bosses of the student workers and administration is the boss of both the teachers and students. District offices and state departments of education contribute to system problems by promoting and attempting to enforce uniformity rather than encouraging diversity. Linda M. McNeil, in *Contradictions of Control* (1986), points out that when school organizations are centered on management by control, teachers and students take school less seriously.

A popular description of the educational system is a comparison to the propeller-driven airplane. The airplane allows us to move about more freely, allows the postal service to deliver mail more quickly and families were able visit to each other without driving across the country. It was a great invention at the time. However, when the jet engine was developed, it allowed for more efficient and effective travel. It did not mean that the propeller driven airplane is not a good invention; just that it is slowly becoming obsolete. The same can be said for the factory-driven model of the school system. In a world of global communication and global economies, we must rethink our purpose, curriculum and management styles.

What is needed to accomplish the transformation into the global era is a move toward what is known as lead management. William Glasser, M.D. writes extensively about the concepts of lead management in his books *The Quality School* (1991) and *The Quality School Teacher* (1993). Glasser explains that a lead manager must communicate a compelling vision of quality and inspire cooperation. The lead manager spends the majority of time on removing the barriers to quality that exist in the system.

Research recognizes the importance of the principal's role in restructuring the school. Management leadership is essential to the implementation of educational change. Lasting change comes from commitment, not authority. When teachers are involved in decisions that affect them, commitment can become a powerful reality. Teachers and administrators who develop a common framework for understanding the interdependence of their work can make the changes that will result in quality learning for students.

Quality management is holistic and must be adopted in its entirety if it is to be effective. The responsibility of management is to facilitate change in the system. Therefore, the focus of change must be on the management responsibilities of the principal towards the teachers as workers and on the management responsibilities of the teacher toward the learners as workers. The teacher, a key player in the proposed transformations, is both a manager and a worker in the school for quality learning.

In our book, *The School for Quality Learning* (1993), we explain the basic differences in focus between management styles.

The adults in the school must become environmentalists. They must design, maintain, and constantly strive to improve an environment that is flexible enough to accommodate everyone. That environment must provide opportunities for the development of individual responsibility and self-directed behavior.

The true catalyst for change is the Vision and Direction; knowing what needs to be accomplished. Deming's first management point is to create a constancy of purpose. The school's focus must be to create a constancy of purpose for improving students' abilities to become productive learners and citizens. All of the members of the school community must understand the purpose of the school. It is not sufficient for people to do their best without knowing what to do. Though best efforts are essential, without the knowledge of purpose and mission they can do much damage in the absence of guiding principles.

There is a difference between a constancy of purpose and a mission statement. The purpose is the reason for existence. The mission statement is more of a combination of philosophy and how the purpose is to be accomplished. Several key questions for districts and schools to discuss are:

1. What are the purposes of an elementary, middle school, and/or high school education?
2. Why does our school exist?

There are many possible answers to the question. They might include:

1. To provide the basic skills.
2. To provide a well-rounded education.
3. To teach responsibility.
4. To prepare learners for the world of work.

In the past few years, as the quality movement has entered education, little, if any, of the benefits reach the classroom. The school, and ultimately each classroom within the school, is the only entity close enough to the learner to understand and appreciate quality learning and to make a difference for the learner.

In order for quality to reach the classroom, Dr. Glasser, in synthesizing Deming, suggests that three major conditions must occur for quality work to become a regular practice rather than an occasional result. They are: quality work can only be achieved in a warm, friendly, non-coercive environment; quality must be discussed, displayed and expected; and self-evaluation is the key to quality.

In managing for change, the processes and realistic time frames must be considered. With that in mind, the discussion and evaluation of the three E's can be helpful in creating both a starting point and focal point for change.

The Three E's are:

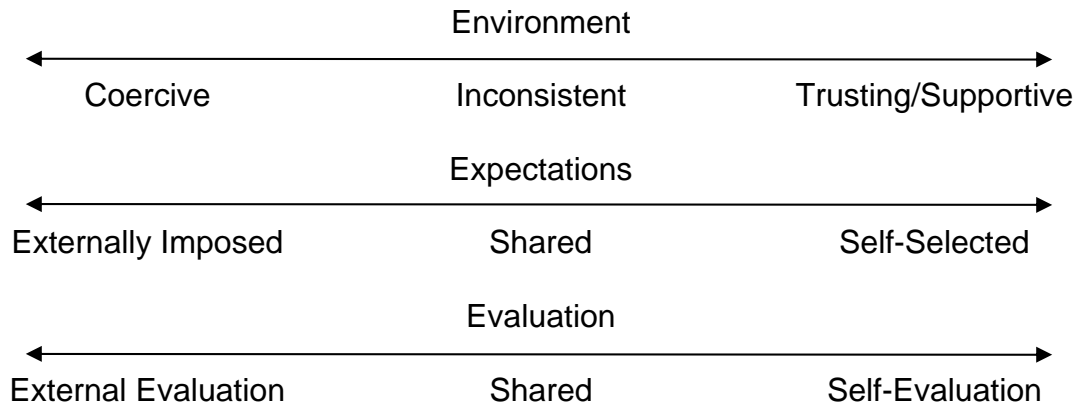
Environment refers to the physically and psychologically safe environment that is necessary for quality work and self-evaluation to occur. We are talking about focusing on creating an environment where learners and educators are comfortable and willing to take the risks necessary to learn and grow. A common practice that does not help to eliminate the fear of failure, or create a trusting environment, is to ask students to try to solve some math problems with which they are struggling. When they comply and attempt the problems, though unsuccessfully, they are still given a low grade.

Expectations of quality work must be managed for, discussed and displayed. Students must learn what quality work is and how to demonstrate and explain how the knowledge and skills are useful to them. The existing system of one objective per class per day, whether or not the students learn, does not produce quality work and/or much learning.

Evaluation refers to the learners developing the skill of evaluating their work. In

conjunction with the proper environment and expectations, this can be accomplished through self-evaluation or concurrent evaluation (with the teacher). It should not be oversimplified by requiring the learners to just "put a grade on your paper".

In assisting others through the change process, it is helpful to put the three areas on a continuum. This enables people to look at where they are in the process and to determine if they are moving in the right direction.



Because change is difficult, the questions that one must ask for continuous improvement are:

1. Are we taking advantage of the opportunities to include others in creating a positive, supportive environment?
2. What are we doing to create an environment that is positive, supportive and encourages risk-taking?
3. Are we taking advantage of opportunities to include others in setting expectations and discussing quality?
4. What are we doing to teach our learners to create quality work?
5. Are we taking advantage of opportunities to include others in concurrent-evaluation?
6. Are we taking advantage of opportunities to ask others to evaluate their work?
7. What are we doing to evaluate the environment, expectations and evaluation of our classrooms, school and/or district?

In discussing and evaluating the Three E's, there are many questions that can be asked to help administrators, teachers, support staff, etc., evaluate where they are and where they would like to be, in the above continuum.

In order to move toward quality learning, all segments of the learner population must be invited to participate, given the freedom to feel invested, and provided the support to excel. There are three key evaluative questions that each school must address:

1. Is what we are doing good for the learner?
2. Are we offering every learner an opportunity for quality learning?
3. Are we working hard to ensure that every learner grasps the opportunity?

A school's product is the quality of its students' learning; whether the consumer of that product is a college, an employer, or society at large, a well-educated, motivated student is desired.

The Chain Reaction in Education as described in The School for Quality Learning is adapted from Deming's Chain Reaction in Business. Improvement in the quality of education eliminates much of the waste of human and material resources. There are fewer defects and therefore the system operates more efficiently and effectively due to less rework.

1. Improve Quality
2. Costs Decrease
3. Productivity Increases
 - Less rework
 - Fewer failures
 - Discipline problems decrease
 - Better use of time
4. System Is Cost Effective
 - Expanded opportunities
 - Students stay engaged in learning
5. Schools provide responsible, productive citizens

There are many reasons to follow Deming's second management point of "Adopt the New Philosophy". The engagement of everyone in the school community in the quest toward quality learning is imperative. The personal and financial arguments have been raised. Can we afford the cost of educational mediocrity and failure?

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Masaki Imai in his book Kaizen declares "Let there be no mistake: quality is management's responsibility, and poor quality is the result of poor management."

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