

Telling it Like it Is in Education: The Muffled, Muzzled, Muted Sounds of Silenced Teachers

FEATURED ARTICLE

The top-down nature of school district management seems to be detrimental to the free flow of ideas.

I suppose that this is due to the factory model of education that places a premium on the "Chain of Command."

Unfortunately, education seems to borrow only part of a concept from the business world (See our article on Benchmarking in our article reprints: Vol. 1 No. 3).

Reprint at:

<http://www.classroomtoolkit.com/benchmark-testing-falacies.html>

Top down management is yet another of those concepts that school districts get wrong.

Whether this is because of a penchant for "Doing everything on the cheap" or, because education leaders "Just don't get it," I am not sure.

Maybe neither explanation captures the situation fully. Maybe the reality is a bit of both explanations.

Span of Control

Business leaders break the span of control into the supervising of seven subordinates. This allows the supervisor to know the attitudes, knowledge and skills of each person that they supervise.

(This matches the Magic Number "7 plus or minus two, which is the number of conscious items that the human mind can "task switch" and maintain in awareness at one time. More about the Magic Number in a future newsletter.)

In education, the span of control can be over one hundred at the campus principal level. This cannot be managed.

Is it any wonder that some folks have nicknames for principals such as "Dictator," "Tyrant," or my favorite, "Little Napoleons?" Another adaptation is the "Laissez-faire" {Lazy Unfair?}, or hands-off style. Once in a while, a democratic principal emerges.

But, the results seem to be similar for all three models of campus leadership, i.e., the development of cliques and marginal staff happiness.

Telling it Like it Is in Education: The Muffled, Muzzled, Muted Sounds of Silenced Teachers

This is not an indictment of principals, but an obvious result from having to supervise more people than is possible to keep track on a conscious level.

The second handicap that school principals face because of this "Chain of Command" organization is that they are expected to support the Superintendent and the superintendent's assistants.

This leads to the promulgation of all manner of bad decisions that, teachers could rectify (and reject) if they were allowed to speak.

So, even the most democratic principal must influence campus staff to follow the policy pronouncements from "on high." This is the opposite of the kind of leadership that is needed. What is needed is for the principal to take the policies that the teaching staff identifies and develops; then push for supported and money so that teachers can do their jobs right.

But, teachers cannot tell the principal that the principal's ideas are bad, and teachers cannot tell the principal to tell the superintendent to rethink the latest initiative because the underlying assumptions, support, expertise, budget or project designs are:

- Inadequate
- Under funded
- Unrealistic
- Not valid
- Based upon unreliable data
- Untested
- Biased against...
- Too much work for no additional compensation
- Or any number of hidden, detrimental aspects that will come to light later as the initiative flops and fizzles

Worst of all, teachers cannot come right out and say that the idea, proposal, initiative, orders are "Bad for Children, and we won't do it!"

Telling it Like it Is in Education: The Muffled, Muzzled, Muted Sounds of Silenced Teachers

- Sidebar -

I couldn't resist adding this Internet classic. (Origin unknown.) I changed two words to make the text appropriate for this Newsletter, but you probably will guess which words those were. :-)

The Plan

In the beginning, there was the Plan. And then came the Assumptions. And the Assumptions were without form, And the Plan was without substance. And darkness was upon the face of the Workers. And they spoke among themselves, saying, "It is a crock and it stinketh."

And the Workers went into their Supervisors and said, "It is a pail of dung and none may abide the odor thereof."

And the Supervisors went unto their Managers, saying, "It is a container of excrement and it is very strong, such that none may abide by it."

And the Managers went unto their Directors, saying, "It is a vessel of fertilizer and none may abide its strength." And the Directors spoke amongst themselves, saying one to another, "It contains that which aids plant growth and it is very strong."

And the Directors went unto the Vice President, saying, "It promotes growth and it is very powerful."

And the Vice Presidents went unto the President, saying, "This new Plan will actively promote the growth and vigor of the company with powerful effects."

And the President looked upon the Plan and saw that it was good. And the Plan became Policy.

This is how "Stuff Happens."

- End Sidebar -

Since it is our policy to write about what teachers can do something about, you have been wondering where this article was leading.

I'll answer that concern with a question.

Telling it Like it Is in Education: The Muffled, Muzzled, Muted Sounds of Silenced Teachers

What if even half of our teachers began speaking out concerning the NCLB Law, describing...

- How poorly this law was funded
- How poorly this law was implemented
- How badly our students and teachers fair under this law
- How inept our political leaders and district administrators are for insisting that teachers follow this law

Another question:

If physicians received an equivalent directive, one that would harm their patients, would they refuse to participate?

Teachers could have claimed that the law deserved to have a chance to prove whether its approach was valid. But not anymore, not after four years of detriment.

How much stress, pain, and wasted opportunities will teaches have to endure before there is a collective outcry.

Let's un muffle, un mute, un silence our teachers so that our students can learn in a creative, dynamic, supportive environment.

Does any teacher want to speak out and join the ranks of the unemployed?

It seems like reversing this law calls for a nation-wide job action on the part of teachers. Otherwise, individual teachers who speak out will be swatted like flies on the kitchen table.

Is there an unemployed, vocal teacher that wants to start a grassroots movement to free our children from the negative effects of this law?

Or, will we be content to say nothing and wait another three years until a new administration replaces NCLB with another, equally unenlightened law? Just like NCLB replaced the "what was it? I don't remember anymore" law of the previous administration.