

The Quest for Kaizen

by Ardith Shirley, NBTA Staff Officer

kaizen[kahy-zen] noun

1. a business philosophy or system that is based on making positive changes on a regular basis, as to improve productivity.
2. an approach to one's personal or social life that focuses on continuous improvement.

Origin of kaizen - Japanese: literally, 'continuous improvement'

While researching for an upcoming workshop I came across the Japanese term 'kaizen'. I can't pretend this was the first time I had heard the term (a colleague who was enrolled in a Lean Six Sigma course had previously shared the idea with me), but for some reason the idea as presented this time truly resonated with me in this time and space. (Isn't it funny how that happens?)

Perhaps it could be that when I first was introduced, kaizen was described to me almost exactly as defined in the dictionary (noted above). I have to confess that my initial reaction was a bit cynical as the word 'business' jumped off the page at me and my educator brain immediately thought, "Great! Another business model that someone who has never set foot in a classroom wants to apply to education."

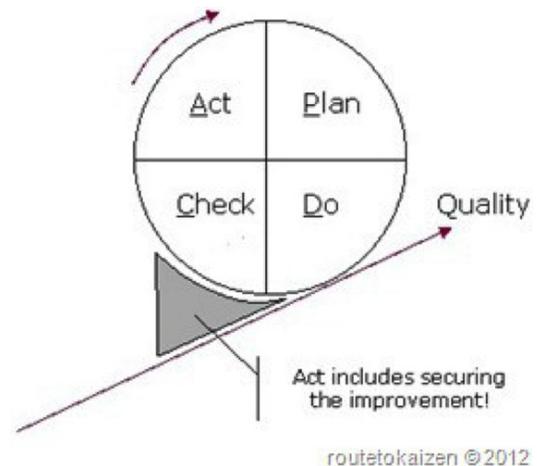
This time, when I happened upon the term kaizen in the context of an article written by a respected fellow educator who was exploring best practices for providing effective feedback to stimulate learning in humans – regardless of age. (John Hattie's meta-analysis (2009) concludes that providing effective feedback to students and teachers is the highest yield strategy we can employ if we are serious about increasing learning within our education system. Since my own experience agrees with Hattie, I find myself compelled to focus my own learning efforts in that area.)

My New Understanding:

Kaizen - the view that **every defect** is a **treasure** that offers a chance to improve.

One of the predominant principles that spoke to me from my educator colleague's article was that in order for our brains to engage and learn, we must first feel safe. Sounds simple until we consider that "safe" in this case goes beyond obvious threat to our physical being and can include everyday stresses and fears that human beings can experience daily – fear of looking stupid, fear of failure, fear of disappointing someone we care about – and the list goes on!

Given the sheer number and complexity of relationships and dynamics within our schools and all of the learners within them, I found myself wondering how often we, as feedback providers, are truly able to achieve that 'sweet spot' with the learners we are responsible for? How often are we, as learners, able to effectively hear and use feedback provided to us? Bryan Goodwin seems to underscore my thinking when he notes in a recent article in the November issue of *Educational Leadership*: "High-pressure environments - whether in schools or business – make it hard for people to own up to their shortcomings and work together." (Goodwin, 2015)¹ He goes on to observe, "Educators who fear being judged by their shortcomings will be less likely to engage in self reflection. **Unless thoughtful leaders create a safe environment and create a mindset closer to what Japanese manufacturers call kaizen - to view that every defect is a treasure that offers a chance to improve - teachers can have all the data in the world but they won't be able to use the information to guide improvement.**" (Goodwin, 2015)²



Makes sense to me! Best wishes as we strive to be brave enough to celebrate our defects with one another in our common quest for kaizen.

Sources:

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/kaizen>

Route to Kaizen by Yousef (available online at: <https://routetokaizen.wordpress.com/tag/better/>)

Goodwin, B. *Mind Sets Are Key To Effective Data Use*. Educational Leadership (November 2015) P. 78-9

Kondo, M. *The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up – the Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*. Ten Speed Press (Oct. 14 2014).

¹Goodwin, B. *Mind Sets Are Key To Effective Data Use*. Educational Leadership (November 2015) P. 79

²Goodwin, B. *Mind Sets Are Key To Effective Data Use*. Educational Leadership (November 2015) P. 79

May I Recommend:

Now Trending by Sheila Giesbrecht, a consultant with Manitoba Education appears in the Winter 2016 issue of *Education Canada*. Her common-sense caution that chasing after every educational innovation leads to frustrated, overloaded staff and fragmented efforts is important to remind ourselves and explores how we can find our focus. The article is meant as a starting point for discussion, asking, "How do we know what educational innovations make sense for us?" and "How can we apply educational innovations thoughtfully and responsibly? (Available online at: <http://www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada/article/now-trending>)

A great article on providing feedback to peers - "To give a colleague feedback that he or she will regard as valid, start by believing the teacher is capable and wants to do the best possible job." Marceta Reilly, p. 36 *Educational Leadership – Co-Teaching* (January 2016)"

NBTA has worked very hard to raise awareness provincially about concerns we have surrounding student absenteeism. A recent article from John Hopkins University agrees! "A growing body of research indicates that missing 10% of the year or more for any reason including unexcused absence, excused absence and suspension places students at significant risk of negative outcomes, including academic difficulty and failure, increased vomiting, juvenile justice system and dropping out." Balfanz & Byrnes (2012). *Chronic absenteeism: summarizing what we know from nationally available data*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Ctr. For Social Organization Schools. *Educational Leadership – Doing Data Right* (November 2015)

It was nice to see an acknowledgement that in order to expect teachers to delve into evidence-based decision making collaboration time is essential. "Schools and districts that successfully promote data informed decision-making often have one key feature in common - dedicated collaboration time for teachers." Amanda Datnow and Vicky Park, Page 10 *Educational Leadership – Doing Data Right* (November 2015)

I also recently explored ASCD's Healthy School Report Card Action Tool – I found it well worth my time. A couple of quotes from the tool: "Healthy school communities are settings in which students, staff, parents, and community members work collaboratively to ensure that each student is emotionally and physically healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. They are settings in which the school and community engage each other to effectively support the school improvement process. ASCD's work in this area is part of a large, multiyear plan to shift public dialogue about education from a focus on a narrow curriculum-centric and accountability system to a whole child approach that encompasses all factors required for successful student outcomes." Curious? Check it out at:

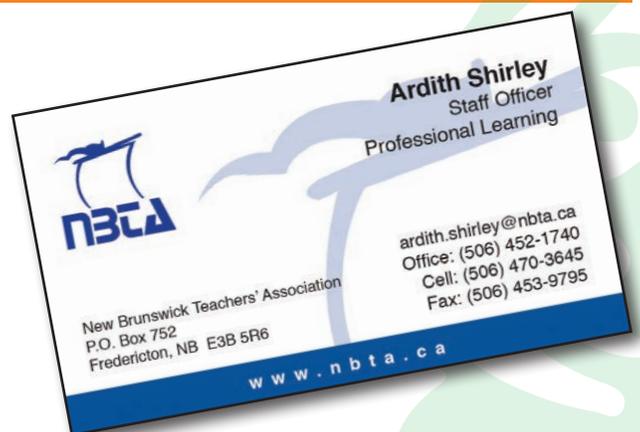
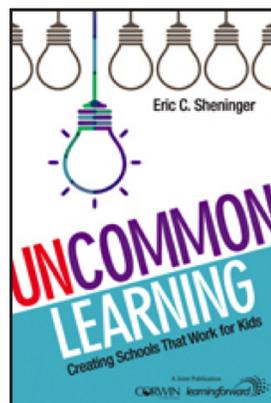
<http://www.ascd.org/programs/learning-and-health/healthy-school-communities.aspx>

Ardith

Book Give-Away!

Congratulations to **Angela Thomson** of Ridgeview Middle School who was the winner of our October Give Away!

Our next draw will be for *Uncommon Learning – Creating Schools That Work for Kids* by Eric Sheneringer. Sound interesting? Drop me an email at ardith.shirley@nbta.ca with the subject line "Book Draw".



Closing Quotes:

"Everything is perfect and there is always room for improvement."

— Shunryu Suzuki