COVEY, COPERNICUS AND THE CHESHIRE CAT...

> Alice's *Cheshire Cat* validated Steven Covey's principle: *"Start with the end in mind…"* when he noted that in it's absence, *"any road will get you there."*
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> These simple ideas are strangely connected to the complex picture faced by anyone trying to "fix" schools today. There seem to be too many "roads" proposed [and even mandated] and many seem contradictory. Could the problem be with "the end in mind?"
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> Here, Copernicus supposedly taught us a lesson about how to make sense out of conflicting "common sense" experiences. When things that you continue to "see" no longer seem to produce the results they "should," consider re-thinking the way you are looking at them.
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> Is it possible that the "end" – the central reason for -- the system our mind creates to frame our understanding of these events -- needs to be reconsidered?

Beyond the *individual child...*

Actually, what if schools haven't been going in the "wrong" direction, but just didn't go far enough down the road to make sure everything could contribute to getting there? History suggests we stopped our goal-seeking at what seemed to be the common sense end -- the *individual* student.

Consequently, since the 60's, major reforms have focused on instruction appropriate for an individual child. *That was the goal of individualized instruction, individually-guided education, etc.* Technology's values similarly were expressed in terms of their potential for individualization. It's also the rationale for smaller class sizes.

But standing between the "here" we start with and that critically important goal of the individual learner has always been the issue of manageability. Where would the resources -- not just funding, but time and people -- come from? That issue still drives the reform debates.

What hasn't informed that debate, however, is that something happened along the way that took that "goal" away from us by changing its *fundamental nature*. Interacting with the individual child was no longer an end, but instead a prerequisite to the actual goal. It wasn't the child at the end of our teaching processes, but that child's mind and the *learning processes* embedded in it.

An analogy might help here. Consider a hospital that appropriately "understood" that they had no choice but to deal with each person that came in its doors as an *individual.* But, while it could identify different symptoms, it didn't have the understanding or methods to "treat" the common built-in *processes* that enabled that person to function as a coherent connected system. (E.g., the breathing process, the digestive process, the circulatory process, etc.)

This hospital might intuitively do things right for some, but they'd never know why, or how to improve them for all.

But that's not how hospitals work because they accept those common <u>biological</u> processes as "givens" -- the <u>starting points</u> for figuring out how to respond to *each* individual's unique needs.

In the same way, the body of research emerging from cognitive science and neurobiology over the past decade or so has provided a comparable body of knowledge about the common process of *learning* as a <u>biological</u> process pre-wired in <u>all</u> human's from birth on.

These are the actual "givens" -- the "starting" points that define "*Where we are.*" And today would evoke the *Cheshire Cat* to add -- *"If you don't know where you are, then you can't tell where the nearest roads are."*

More significantly, what this new body of knowledge, as in medical practice, tells us is that *individualization for all* <u>can</u> be managed.

•   It <u>is</u> possible to systemically create and sustain information and support structures that focus professional care and commitment on *each* child.

•   …That then make it possible to <u>start</u> instruction at the same place that medical practitioners start -- with the actual *intrinsic* strengths, needs and requirements of *each* individual.

•   …And then to continually navigate a "road" to "get them *there*" – as they develop the capacities that society wants, and needs, them to have.