

John L. Pryor

After all is said and done, usually more is said than done. Why? The incredible balancing act that goes into moving organizations from ineffective to proficient or from good to great requires tremendous energy, sound organization and common philosophical direction. It also has to happen in the same timeframe. Like the entertainer on the old “Ed Sullivan Show,” who at the same time, would get 50 plates spinning atop long sticks. Timing is absolutely critical. As he would add more plates, others would lose momentum. He constantly moved about, adding new plates and reinforcing the momentum of plates already spinning. Occasionally a plate would crash to the floor, requiring a new plate.

In the organization of educational leadership, the spinning is never ending and plates crash constantly. New Board of Education Members are elected each year; budgets are expanded or contracted in conjunction with these new members who bring a new philosophy with their membership or the ever changing tax revenues available. Agendas come, agendas go. To create change, timing is critical.

I was fortunate to attend St. John’s doctoral program at a time when Drs. Hughes, Smith, McGuire and Dunlop were at the core of the program. Each offered an integral part of my educational leadership philosophy.

Dr. Hughes is easy. “What does the data tell us?” How often, as I review the seemingly endless data that is now available to educators, do I hear his voice? If data is at the foundation of our analysis for the need of change, then Dr. Hughes is my Bolman & Deal of organizational framework. What are the problems, where do we find the solutions and what needs to be in place in order to move toward these possible solutions?

Dr. McGuire provides the systems needed in order to begin to move toward possible solutions. After looking at Deming, Collins Senge, Covey and many other systems thinkers, I have come to my resting place. There is only Deming. All the others merely expanded upon rephrased or modernized his system model. Deming’s “14 Points” are the model I used in moving my school along the path of “Good to Great”.

Dr. Smith was our Plato, “What does all of this mean?” Very often, the things you hate the most are the things you remember best. Deborah Stone’s “Policy Paradox” was the one book I had the most difficulty swallowing. At first reading it came off as pompous, racist and insulting. Then you analyze the book, then

you reread chapters and then one day at a budget meeting you hear yourself say, “Those numbers are not realistic. They only matter to you because they address your agenda.” That is when you realize that most of what we say in the educational forum is merely “Strategic Representations” of what the facts are. As I have gotten more mature in my educational leadership role, I have realized that my “Strategic Representations” need to reflect what is good for the educational advancement of my school, not what is necessarily good for John L. Pryor. Analyzing what is good for the educational advancement of my school is a new “Strategic Representation” introspection.

Dr. Dunlop was the force that reduced the friction in our mechanical system, thus increasing the potential energy. Her insights provided the practical knowledge necessary to navigate the centripetal energy fields created by the spinning of that one large plate “Educational Leadership.”

- * Can you create a leader? (McGuire)

- * Who decides what a leader should look like? (Smith)

- * What does the data tell us? (Hughes)

- * Don't give up, keep moving, look at the research. (Dunlop)

It is important to acknowledge Dr. Mitchell. She provided valuable information on statistics and multiculturalism. Working in a school that is a successful blend of African-American, Hispanic and Caucasian, it was refreshing to learn that what we have been doing at Bridgehampton for the last four years is a good model for student success in a diverse school setting. Dr. Mitchell's work is important; however, for the purpose of this writing it will play only a minor role.

As this spinning plate of knowledge, divided into the three elements of counterbalancing forces, Hughes - Organization, McGuire - Systems thinking and Smith - Philosophy, revolve around a support system – Dunlop, I have created my own model of the essential components of Educational Leadership.