The Sixth "P" – Politics **

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Invitational theory presents the concept of invitations as related to five factors: people, places, policies, programs, and processes (Purkey & Schmidt, 1990). In this article, I propose the addition of a sixth "P," politics. The assumption is that without addressing the political aspect of schools and school systems, success of the invitational model with the other five dimensions is undermined or negated at best.

In spite of reform movements of past and recent years the "deep structures of schooling," as Cuban (1990) described them, are unchanged. Schools remain characterized by balkanized divisions or departments (Hargreaves, 1989). Students are taught subjects, failed and retained in grades, or passed and graduated with little empirical support for either process. Likewise, students are "labelled, libeled, sorted and grouped" in contradiction to the findings of educational research (Purkey & Novak, 1984). Why, in spite of a plethora of change efforts over the years, are schools fundamentally the same as they used to be?

In The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform, Sarason (1990) answered this question by noting that "in education the mistakes in conception and action have been many, and almost all of them derive from an inability to comprehend the nature of the school system" (p. 27). Traditionally, school reform has focused on one aspect or another without looking at the school as a total system. It has ignored power relationships and until recently, failed to see schools as distinctive cultures. Fullan (1990) captured this idea:

> Our attention in policy, practice and research has shifted in recent years, away from preoccupation with single innovations toward more basic integrative, and systematic reform. Changes in the culture of schools, in the roles and relationships of schools, districts, universities and states, and in integrating teacher development, school improvement, leadership and curriculum toward more engaging learning experiences for students and teachers, dominate the current scene and will continue to do so for the rest of the decade. (p. 137)
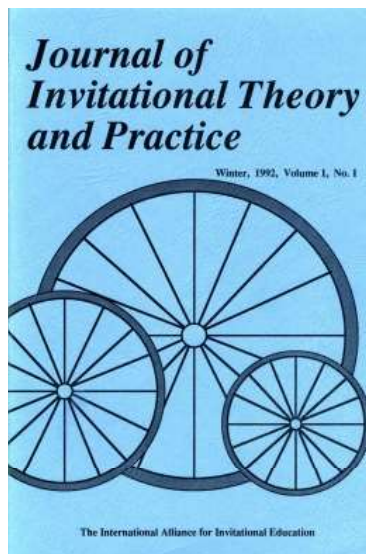
At a recent presentation, a teacher of agricultural science in rural Pennsylvania explained the concept more simply. He compared the school to a spider web, which, when touched on one part, reverberates throughout its entire structure. Educational reformers who forget or ignore this concept do so at their own peril. The attractiveness of invitational theory is that it provides a philosophical and conceptual gestalt that allows leaders to address the entire school as an integrated system. Political behavior must be a vital part of this gestalt if change is to occur.

The term politics as used here is not intended in the conventional sense of back room deals, win-lose negotiations and situational ethics. Nor do I mean politics as a process of "exchanging gratifications in a political market place" (Burns, 1978, p. 258) as in "You scratch my back, I scratch yours." Rather, to act politically is to raise the aspirations of others through teaching, mentoring and coaching. The ingredients of this process are "honesty, responsibility, fairness, the honoring of commitment" (Burns, 1978, p. 258). As such, acting politically means building collaborative cultures through shared vision and shared decision-making. It means "doing with" as opposed to "doing to" people (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). It means operating from an invitational stance of trust, optimism, respect, and intentionality. It also means effecting authentic change within complex organizations. The following are fifteen guidelines for thinking politically and incorporating the sixth "P" into the invitational process.

1) Dream with Your Eyes Open

Block (1987) in The Empowered Manager described a vision in the organizational sense as a dream with one's eyes wide open. This means starting with the end, the goal, in mind. People's vision of a more attractive future provides them and others, with a clear purpose. George Bernard Shaw (1950) expressed this idea when he wrote:

> This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one...the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. (Preface)

The invitational vision provides an attractive dream of what some schools are, and all schools can be. The challenge is staying the course when the "naysayers" attack. In situations where invitational philosophy is not inherent in the cultural mainstream, it will take courage and integrity to hold one's vision.

2) Develop a Vision and a Voice

People who think politically not only articulate a vision, they share power and authority in such a way as to invite others to share the dream. In her book The Female Advantage, Helgesen (1990) wrote of replacing the concept of vision with the concept of voice. Vision is a one-way process. It may exist alone in the mind of a single human being, but voice requires someone to hear it. Voice therefore is interactive. The comparison becomes clearer if one considers vision as the ability to look into the distance and determine an appropriate path to take. By including the concept of voice, the traveller invites others to journey on the trip together. Invitational leaders behave politically if they possess both vision and voice to know what messages to send and then to send them.

3) Think Big, Start Small

People who act politically can look at the big picture, articulate aspirations, while "sweating the small stuff." In a study of change in secondary schools, Louis and Miles (1990) described the politically adept leader as one who uses every opportunity to discuss values, to articulate a vision and to place each issue into the context of the larger picture. Without attending to small but irritating issues, however, we may find that big issues can become obscured. For this reason, as faculties develop a discipline code, it is placed in the larger context of creating a positive learning climate in an inviting school. When administrators organize parents' nights, they do so within the context of inviting and involving parents in the educational process. It is through this global view and process that people begin to share the vision, and it in turn gives meaning to changes within the school. "If reforms are to be successful, individuals and groups must find meaning concerning what should change as well as how to go about it" (Fullan, 1991, p. xi).

4) Cherish Your Opponents

Block (1987) suggested analyzing colleagues' willingness to buy into an invitational vision on two dimensions: 1) how well do people trust others, and 2) to what extent do people agree with others. Those people who trust and agree with the vision should be continually invited to maintain their support. Those who trust but question the vision or changes it implies are the most valuable of colleagues because they will give genuine, honest feedback. It is through interaction with this group that people gradually begin to build a shared vision. With other groups, such as those who tend to dim the vision or ignore the voice, leaders continue to invite by demonstrating trust, providing information, and offering opportunities to participate. In the last analysis however, the culture of the school will not sustain people who are consistently and intentionally disinviting.

5) Build Collaborative Cultures

A fundamental premise of invitational theory is the interdependence of people. Nowhere is this more crucial than in schools and school systems. As Rosenholtz (1989) stated, "the extent of school goal-setting, evaluation, shared values and collaboration represents the work place conditions most conducive to teachers' learning opportunities and their schools' self-renewal" (p. 79). Similarly, Moss Kanter (1984) in her examination of change in complex organizations argued for greater collaboration in the work place where "corporate entrepreneurs produce innovative achievement by working in collaborative/participative fashion: persuading much more than ordering" (p. 237). Successful organizational leaders, regardless of whether they are in the private or public sectors need to be skilled at team-building, seeking input from others, showing political sensitivity to the interests of others, and willing to share rewards and recognition.

Unfortunately, the existing paradigm of relationships in schools is one of teacher isolation. As Little (1988) stated, "Traditional authority relations in schools and districts, as well as conventional teacher evaluation procedures, communicate a view of teaching as an individual enterprise" (p. 84). In a similar vein, Hargreaves (1989) reported, "If isolation purges the classroom of blame and criticism, it also shuts out possible sources of praise and support" (p. 7). Rosenholtz (1989) described a "moving school" as one in which instructional goals are shared goals, and the norms of the culture are those of collaboration, continuous improvement, and optimism that all students can learn. Collaboration, however, can exist in disinviting ways. As one colleague pointed out, "Hells Angels are collegial." The key to acting politically is to establish a culture which promotes the norms of both collaboration and continuous benefit to individuals and the organization.

6) Involve Teachers in the Change Process

"Educational change depends on what teachers do and think-it's as simple and complex as that" (Fullan, 1991, p. 117). Historically, teachers have been subjected to political behavior without their input and participation. Again, there is a vision without a pluralistic voice. For example, it is common on the political level to devise a change, and then through new curriculum guidelines, instructional manuals, changes in textbooks, or mandated tests for students and/or teachers, expect learning for students to improve. These attempts have failed in the past and will continue to fail in the future because teachers have not been involved. They find little personal or professional meaning in the process. When teachers are viewed as knowledgeable workers, professional educators, and instructional leaders, schools will improve.

> Good teachers are necessarily autonomous in professional judgement. They do not need to be told what to do. They are not professionally the dependents of researchers, of super-intendents, of innovators or supervisors. This does not mean that they do not welcome access to ideas created by other people at other places or in other times. Nor do they reject advice, consultancy or support. But they do know that ideas and people are not of much real use until they are digested to the point where they are subject to the teacher's own judgement. In short, it is the task of all educationalists outside the classroom to serve the teachers; for only teachers are in position to create good teaching. (Stenhouse, 1984, p. 69)

7) Make Your School A Learning Community

The work of Joyce (1990) suggests in-service can affect significant change. His staff development principles of theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and coaching have proven to be a useful model for change. While his model has practical application, it may appear to be a "doing to" as opposed to a "doing with" process. As Hargreaves and Dawe (1989) argued, most in-service programs "withhold from teachers opportunities for wider reflection about the context of their work; which deprofessionalize and disempower teachers in denying them the opportunity to discuss and debate what and how they teach; which smuggle bureaucratically determined ends into ostensibly neutral procedures for improving technical skills" (p. 27).

Since the apparent world-wide trend is to effect educational change school by school by school, schools must become learning communities for teachers, and the principal, in Barth's (1990) words, must become the "head learner." Staff development becomes part of the on-going life of the school and intricately related to the goals of the school. Change occurs through leaders who can act politically to create a learning community in each school. Schools and school systems will thrive to the degree that learning equals or exceeds the pace of change.

8) Cultivate Friendly Facts

It is said that if a frog is placed in boiling water, it will immediately jump out. If, however, one places the frog in lukewarm water and gradually raises the temperature to the boiling point, the frog will adapt until it become groggy and unable to jump out of the pot. Even though there are no restraints, the frog will sit in the water and boil to death.

If educators are to think politically, they have to determine when and how the temperature is being turned up. Acquiring this ability comes from assessing and learning about what Waterman (1988) called "friendly facts." Teachers need to be able to answer questions such as: Are students learning? Are they learning things that are important and significant? Is the school population changing? Is society getting its money's worth? Are teachers growing and developing professionally? Is the school an effective school, and is it effective for all students? These are tough questions, but educators must be prepared to answer them or others will provide ready-made answers, some of which will be detrimental to our students and schools.

9) Recognize Your Paradigm

According to the futurist, Barker (1989), a paradigm is "a set of rules and regulations that: 1) define boundaries; and 2) tell you what to do to be successful within those boundaries" (p. 27). One strategy to think politically is to know and understand one's own paradigm and be able to make accurate assessments of the paradigms of others.

Words like ritual, dogma, custom, and habit help to describe paradigms. Paradigms are the mental maps that enable people to define their realities. For example, the word "school" triggers a different paradigm for teachers, students, parents, taxpayers, and legislators. If educators are to exercise the sixth "P," then they must listen carefully to the various stakeholders to understand the various "school" paradigms. More significantly, they must reflect on their own school paradigm. The greatest danger occurs when professional educators see one model, one theory, as the only possible paradigm. This "paradigm paralysis" often accounts for resistance to change and insensitivity to people's concern about change, even invitational change.

10) Try "Ad Hoc" Committees and Pilot Projects

Traditionally, efforts to effect change have been predicated on altering people's attitudes as a prerequisite. There is considerable evidence that such an approach is self-defeating. Unless people get involved and "muck around" in a new process, or at least witness their colleagues involvement, change will not occur. Similarly, if one waits to initiate change until everyone has been included, it could be a long wait.

The solution is "ad hoc" committees and pilot projects. Rather than establishing permanent structures for change, people who think politically start with an "ad hoc" group of members who are willing to experiment. The more broadly representative of the various sub cultures of a school the better. Politically astute leaders let such groups

pilot innovative ideas. They provide support, profile, and rigorous evaluation of the process. As others begin to show interest, these leaders encourage involvement. At the same time, they let participants know that not everything will be a success. When things go "off the rails" they help people try again. Followers and developers of invitational theory know the importance of "I can" for students. This belief is as important if not more important with adults who also need to nurture their self-concepts.

11) Become an Instructional Leader

This is a tough time to be a school principal. Educational and leadership expectations over the past ten years have been raised significantly. In the past, principals were chosen because of their administrative or managerial skills. In recent years, principals are not only expected to be effective managers, but also instructional leaders (Smith and Andrews, 1989). Recent literature tends to categorize leaders as people "who do the right things" and managers as people "who do things right." In this comparison, the management function is seen as dull, routine, and secondary in importance. Louis and Miles (1990), however, found that successful principals were accomplished in both of these dimensions. Accepting their finding, we might assume that principals who are accomplished in the sixth "P" not only establish a vision and invite people to share in the adventure, they also are expert at problem-solving, decision-making, conflict resolution and in setting up systems that get things done.

12) Develop a Mission Statement

A mission statement answers two questions: What business are we in? And, how do we do business? The answer to these questions is the organization's shared vision, articulated for the world to see. It is the product of the long, sometimes tedious process of clarifying values and shaping a vision for the organization. Such a statement should not be rushed. What separates a true mission statement from pure rhetoric is the degree of commitment from the people in the organization. The central focus for goal-setting, problem-solving, and conflict resolution is the mission.

Here is an example of a mission statement for a school:

The staff members of Etivini High School commit themselves to:

* teaching so that all students learn

* preparing students for an information age

The staff members of Etivini High School will achieve these goals by:

* ensuring that they apply the principles of invitational theory, personally and professionally

* developing a learning atmosphere for students, parents, staff, and the community

13) Honor Elected Officials

Being a school board members is often a "no win" job. The public sees you as a spendthrift, while the professional educators liken you to Scrooge. Most school board members are genuinely concerned about the quality of education for all students. Unfortunately, people only hear about the more negative political types who seek office for personal gain or wield power ruthlessly. The processes of developing shared visions, missions, and goals should not exclude the people who put up their hands at school board meetings. By thinking and acting politically, people enroll elected officials in their aspirations for the school.

14) Encourage Strategic Planning

Teachers, administrators, and school board members are often overwhelmed by the number and rapidity of change efforts. As a result, they tend to attempt everything and accomplish nothing. Strategic planning is driven by vision, values, and goals. In the past, traditional long range planning focused more on dividing up the turf and

getting things done efficiently. Today, strategic planning processes commit the organization to a few "high leverage" objectives for an extended period of time. It reflects the shared vision and mission of the organization. Senge's The Fifth Discipline (1990) provides a useful discussion of such "systematic thinking."

15) Make the Important Choices

"This is all very well for you" a reader might say, "but you don't know my circumstances; they prevent any real change." While each circumstance is unique, we are a product of our decisions, not the conditions that surround us. In the marvelous book Man's Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl (1984) illustrated this belief with deep emotion, vivid tragedy, and an optimistic vision. Frankl was a Jewish doctor who, unlike his entire family, survived Nazi concentration camps. In his book, he wrote of men who gave their last morsel of bread so that others might survive, and they too survived. Whereas, others less fortunate and less inspired gave up and died very quickly. From his experiences, Frankl wrote:

> The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action...Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress...everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms-to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstance, to choose one's own way. (1984, p. 86)

People who behave politically choose to approach the people, places, policies, programs, and processes in their schools and school districts from an invitational stance. With this posture they recognize the strength they bring to their personal and professional relationships, and accept the limitless potential of individuals and groups to improve learning environments, processes, and outcomes.

Block (1987) stated that people's choices are between maintenance and greatness, caution and courage, dependence and autonomy. Those who try to think and act politically and, thereby think and act invitationally, come down on the side of greatness, courage, and autonomy. If invitational theory is to have an impact, if it is to have a life after the consultants leave a school or district, then attention to, and training in, the sixth "P" is vital to the process.

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