

The Revolving Door Metaphor

1. What metaphor would you use to describe the school?

The metaphor of a revolving door helps one to understand the annual changes in school leadership. Principals and assistant principals come and go as the years flow in and out. Revolving doors go around and around, allowing people to flow in and out of a building. Sometimes, people get stuck and end up revolving around more than once. John F. Kennedy (JFK) Intermediate School's administrative track record is similar to a revolving door. Administrators seem to come and go in an even flow of in and out with an occasional second go-round. The revolving door also explains the flow of curriculum and its changes. Programs come and go in a cyclical manner.

2. What aspects does the metaphor help one to see and not to see?

Revolving doors are great equalizers – they are meant to be efficient, and access is granted to all. They also keep an even flow of in and out. The metaphor easily allows one to see the cyclic changes in leadership and curriculum. The revolving door also allows one to see the frustration of the staff and is a key reason for lack of stakeholder buy-in to new programs.

Revolving doors are there for anyone's use and it is hard to say who exactly is coming through or what their purpose for being in the building is. Therefore, the metaphor hides the motives, talents, strengths and weaknesses of the leaders and curriculum coming through the door. It does not explain the reasons behind the changes. The metaphor also hides the constancy of the staff working in the building that maintains and delivers the educational foundations to the students.

3. How does the metaphor function as a "constructive falsehood"?

It functions as a 'constructive falsehood' for several reasons. First, it implies that there is something wrong with the administration and curriculum at JFK that needs to be addressed through a yearly change. It also implies that the change was not the answer and thus another change is needed. There is also a problem with the quantitative perception of the changes compared to the qualitative changes. The amount of change has led to the idea of change simply for change's sake and that there is not going to be a constant. Some of the new leaders and programs may well have provided an excellent change towards school improvement, but the revolving door mentality has distorted this. The perception of those involved in the school is that next year will only bring more changes, so why be concerned or buy into the present situation. The revolving door will only spin around again. It distorts the difference between minor and major changes this way. A minor change to improve what is already in place is viewed with the same revolving door mentality.

4. Comparing Deborah Stone's ideas about leadership to Morgan's use of metaphors.

Deborah Stone writes about the strategic representation of leaders and the way they use numbers, stories, and symbols to further their causes and interests and help sway decisions. This is very akin to the idea of using metaphors to describe organizations. In this way, leaders are able to use the metaphor as a form of strategic representation. The metaphors can distort the vision of the organization by highlighting some parts and hiding others. It creates a "how things are done" situation that forces people to assume certain roles and thought patterns.

Another similarity can be found in the idea of Stone's Polis and Morgan's metaphors of organization. They both speak about rational and linear (Stone's Market model and Morgan's organization as a machine or a brain. Both speak about the paradoxes that exist in organizations and forming policy. Morgan's organization as a political system is aligned with Stone's ideas about power, interests, equity, symbolism and inducements. These are all used by leaders to influence the decision making process and form the policy that runs the organization.

The "ugly face organization" can be compared to Stone's idea about liberty. One person's rights and freedom can be in contrast to another person's. They both give examples about big business and the harm it can cause. Leaders use laws, rules and power to force their will on others.

As a leader, both Stone and Morgan make me realize that in order to function, I need to be aware of the underlying beliefs of the school district's policy making structure. I need to understand the strategic representation, or metaphors, that are at work, as well as how decisions are made. Situations must be carefully observed and analyzed about to find these underlying key elements. Keeping in mind the paradox that will occur no matter what decision I make will also be helpful. It requires an understanding that a seemingly good solution will still create a problem for someone else.