



2011 CANADA'S OUTSTANDING PRINCIPALS

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ON THE COVER

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EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

~ AGENTS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF SCHOOL CULTURE ~

The Program for Applied Leadership¹ aims to reinforce the five core leadership capacities established as part of the *Ontario Leadership Framework*. It also aims to create a professional learning community, which can support its decisions with facts and encourages a relationship of trust between school leaders. The keynote speaker at this year's Program for Applied Leadership provincial conference² for participating school boards was Dr. Anthony Muhammad.

Dr. Muhammad is a school principal, who made a huge impact in a number of *difficult* schools, most notably at Levey Middle School in Southfield, a Detroit, Michigan suburb. It immediately becomes apparent that Dr. Muhammad is without a doubt the best person to motivate an audience at the launch of a program, which itself aims to demonstrate the benefits of educational leadership in action.

Right away, without sparing his audience, Dr. Muhammad confirms that the main difficulty in the continuous pursuit of success for all students is not so much in the interaction with students as in the work of the educators amongst themselves.

Paraphrasing Einstein, Dr. Muhammad reminds us that we cannot improve results by repeating those same actions that led to the results we are trying to change. Instead, it is the culture that produces these actions, which must be changed. We must keep in mind that in order to truly change the culture, we must change the type of language we use. He focuses on the word culture because, as he explains it, there are two means of change, structural (technical) and cultural.

Cultural change must always come before structural change. Using the example of the sinking ocean liner *Titanic*, Dr. Muhammad explains that it would have been absurd to try to modify the boat's organization (structural change) after having struck the iceberg. The only goal was to make sure all passengers left the boat as quickly as possible. This did not happen because, regardless of the facts, a foundation-less optimism reigned, resulting in a culture unwilling to believe that the ship could sink. In order for all the passengers to leave the liner unharmed, the culture would have had to change

beforehand. This change would have to be based on an analysis of maritime statistics, resulting in the implementation of a suitable safety infrastructure.

There is a difference, confirms Dr. Muhammad, when a culture changes even before thoughts of reshaping the structure or the organization are present. As an example, he talks of socially and economically underprivileged schools in the United States, which succeed over and above their neighbouring schools, whose students come from backgrounds that are more privileged.

When structural changes are used as a means of improving results rather than conditions, they only help to hide a lack of professionalism. It is much easier to establish norms and protocols or to rearrange schedules, than it is to encourage people to work together and in the same direction, for and with students. As for this last point, Dr. Muhammad points out that it is the student's responsibility to learn, and the educator's responsibility to ably give him or her this message.

In order to lead staff, neither the carrot nor the stick are solutions; the art of leadership consists in encouraging each person to adopt the values and beliefs that lead to effective leadership, because belief must make its way into practice. The lecturer adds that often, it is not the strategies that are at fault, but rather the spirit with which people apply these strategies. It is obvious he is talking about the Pygmalion effect.³

Changing the culture consists, above all, in eliminating what Dr. Muhammad calls *toxic culture*. An example of toxic culture for leaders is when, in a situation of failure, they blame others (government, administration, etc.). When leaders spend time trying to determine who, other than themselves, is responsible for what went wrong, they are likely in a toxic culture environment. In reality, having reached this point, leaders are in a state of frustration. Without verbalizing it, they become aware of their inability to set out rules, procedures and practices, and they attribute the responsibility to hierarchical levels over which they have no control.



Dealing with INFORMATION OVERLOAD!

Overview

Although technology helps us work better and faster, it can also have some drawbacks, including causing information overload, also known as *technostress*. Information overload, the state of having too much information at our fingertips at once, has become a way of life for many people. At work and at home, we are bombarded with emails, voice mails, pagers, texts and cell phone calls, all of which are vying for our attention at the same time. Having so much information readily available certainly has benefits, but it can be counterproductive if it prevents you from accomplishing the things you really need to do or keeps you from making good decisions. In this article, you will find some tips for dealing with information overload.

At work

The workplace is often a major source of information overload, because you may feel pressure from multiple sources to respond immediately to incoming emails, phone calls or faxes while completing your work. Experts recommend the following strategies for taming information overload at work:

- **Know your priorities.** At the beginning of your workday, determine what you want to accomplish. Respond to emails and calls related to your daily objective promptly, but give a lower priority to less vital communications. If you are not sure how to prioritize your workload, talk with your manager.
- **Do not let email dominate you.** It is easy to get into a habit of obsessively checking and responding to email. Doing so interrupts your thought process and can make it hard to accomplish anything else. You will be better off if you designate



OWARE and Family Math Night

Gianna Helling, Principal
Sts. Cosmas and Damian Catholic School
Toronto Catholic DSB



On a Wednesday night in February 2011, almost 200 staff, students and parents gathered at Sts. Cosmas and Damian Catholic School to play Oware. Why Oware?

The game of Oware is an ancient board game that originated in Africa around 1400 BC and is still played today in Ghana, Malawi, the Caribbean, South America, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. There are many different versions and names for this game, depending on what country you are from. Mancala is one name; Sungka, Bao and Oware are other names. Because of its wide appeal, many of the students in our schools know the game and have played it.

Oware can be played by students in all grade levels. The level of complexity is entirely dependent on the players. Oware boards are sold in Canada by MACPRI, an organization committed to supporting Africa's development through the promotion and marketing of *Made in Africa* art. Their website is www.macpri.com. Although a representative of MACPRI came to Sts. Cosmas and Damian to sell Oware boards from Ghana, many staff, students and parents learned to play with their own Oware board, an egg carton and 48 buttons, seeds, marbles, beads, beans, etc. Students can also learn to play online or on the smart board.

As part of our African Heritage Month celebrations, the students at Sts. Cosmas and Damian Catholic School were taught how to play Oware. Resource teachers, Adrian Pope and Monica Rohel from the Toronto Catholic DSB's Mathematics Department, arrived at the school on a Wednesday morning. Using a presentation developed by Rose Salerno, Aggie Nemes and the TCDSB curriculum and accountability department, the two teachers were

able to teach eight classes how to play Oware. A lunch and learn was organized for primary and specialty teachers. Intermediate students were asked to take on leadership roles and to help teach younger students. They also acted as student ambassadors for our Family Math Night. Students in grades 4 to 8 from across Toronto can also participate in an Oware tournament, organized at St. Jean de Brebeuf School in Scarborough (Principal Carol Soper). MACPRI will be organizing Canada's First International Oware Tournament in the fall of 2011.

Family Math Night

Family Math Night is a fun event for students and their parents to experience math beyond the curriculum. Although students were at first reluctant participants, they soon learned that math is fun! Students enjoyed playing Oware with their classmates and were excited to play the game with their siblings, parents and friends. Families filled the gymnasium, the hallways and the classrooms. Parents and children competed for prizes, which included OWARE games from Ghana. Although the Toronto Catholic DSB mathematics department brought about 40 games for the evening, and parents purchased games through MACPRI, other students simply made their own Oware game with egg cartons and buttons.