

Illinois Math and Science Academy

From the Selected Works of Stephanie Pace Marshall, Ph.D.

August 25, 1986

Remarks to the First Faculty and Staff Meeting given by Stephanie Pace Marshall, Founding President of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA)

Stephanie Pace Marshall

FACULTY AND STAFF MEETING

AUGUST 25, 1986

I. INTRODUCTION

Special pleasure for me and for administrative staff to see you all here -

This day was one of our bench marks - when the faculty comes.

Sunday, September 7 will be another - when the students come.

Some of us have been working several years to establish this Academy and for us it is really quite extraordinary to actually see it come to fruition.

Reinforce my belief in the capacity we have to shape the possible future - the future will come whether we do anything or not - the fact that the Academy exists is a testimony to what happens when people want something badly enough and are willing to work for it.

Orientation packet calls this session Setting the Stage -Director's Comments.

Comments is really a non-descript word.

Devoid of affect; perhaps Director's perspective or reflections is more accurate.

In the next few days you will be getting lists of information - nuts and bolts.

What I want to do this afternoon in setting the stage is to share some thoughts and some behavioral and operational assumptions and premises with you, to raise some questions that I believe we need to ask this year, to share some of my visions for the future, to give you a sense of me, and what I believe so you are not surprised by what I do and why I do it and to make my behavioral response somewhat more predictable, to give you a sense of how I see our community now and in the future, and to share with you the sense of both privilege and responsibility, I believe we share in being a part of this most unique institution.

In a little less than a week, our 211 students will arrive.

Our commitment is first to them, to provide an unparalleled academic program and a psychologically and socially nurturing environment.

Our second commitment is to the educational community in Illinois . To serve as a laboratory for educational exploration and innovation - so that we can both collaborate and share what we have learned to ensure that the benefit of the State's commitment to this Academy can be felt throughout the State.

It is fitting in many ways that the Academy should be located in Aurora. Ironically, the word Aurora is Latin for DAWN.

It is serendipitous that this is now our home.

In a very real sense we are at the dawn of an enterprise that will evolve into something quite extraordinary.

READ ANIMAL SCHOOL

We have an unparalleled opportunity to create an extraordinary educational environment - to become a lighthouse institution, and to render service to Illinois and the nation by developing a truly comprehensive and interdisciplining educational program that both inspires and provokes, that stretches the imagination and demands detail, that encourages daydreaming and requires accountability, that provides information and develops independent investigators and that nurtures and makes safe and then sends out opportunity to cultivate dichotomies and make them work.

We are here for many individual reasons, probably one reason is that we have been frustrated in a totally traditional setting - we believe we can make a significant difference in the lives of children - if we could only do it our way - if we could synthesize all we believe about teaching and learning and empowering people and try to replicate it within the classroom and the board room - I believe we have that opportunity - I hope none of you are here

because you think its easy to teach smart kids- It isn't - You will probably be stretched more than you have ever been, but I suspect that is another reason you are here.

We are calling our first class of students the charter class - because they are the first - but so are we - we are the charter faculty - and what we do from now on will in many ways set the course of this institution for years to come -

For that reason, we must proceed with care not necessarily caution (Ready, fire, aim) - Making sure we always have the courage to ask the right questions - and then do what is right.

Warren Bennis - has an interesting distinction between a leader and a manager.

Leaders - do the right thing

Managers - do things right

I recognize that doing the right thing may mean that we do it all over again and again. Whether it's redoing a schedule or reformulating an idea.

You are a hand-picked group and for that reason, I believe in our collective intelligence and with the concept of consensual validation - if enough of us think something is right - it probably is.

None of us has a monopoly on wisdom. The point I hope I am making is that we have an opportunity to develop a collaborative partnership.

In an effort to open the Academy and get things started in an incredibly short time, we have undoubtedly already made some mistakes - but quite frankly if we have, the control is ours to change it. We need to take time to reflect on and plan for what we want to become and then do it - together.

III. PHILOSOPHY GOALS OF IMSA

Each of you received a copy of our philosophy statement in the mail; critical that you bring into what we are doing - values, philosophy are not negotiable.

I want to underscore several things.

1. IMSA created to inspire and challenge students to maximize talents for the

benefit of society because they will be the leaders of the 21st Century.

2. Promote climate that will develop individual gifts.
3. Serve as a laboratory for developing, testing, and disseminating innovative techniques in math, science and humanities. (Humanities is not a 2nd class citizen)
4. To constantly evaluate curriculum and instructional strategies - to evaluate everything to see if it is still worthy.
5. Our daily emphasis is on inquiry and discovery. - We are calling our students apprentice investigators.
6. To ensure that our students recognize the importance of service to both other individuals and the community and that they need to give back.
7. We will treat our charges as if each one is capable of extraordinary achievement.

IV. NCA TASK FORCE ON STUDENT SUCCESS

A successful student progresses toward the attainment of those universal characteristics of productive, satisfied and educated persons - among them, the skills, knowledge, personal qualities, and personal values listed below.

A successful student is aware of the skills and qualities being sought.

Knowledge and skills

Mastery of communication, computational and scientific skills

Knowledge of how to learn as a life-long skill

Understanding of the global interaction of all people and societies

Knowledge of family, national and human heritage

Understanding of technology as a tool for human endeavors

Personal Qualities

Self direction

Rational thinking

Creativity

Independence of thought

Eagerness for decency

Aesthetic sensitivity

Willingness to take risks for growth

Ability to sustain effort toward the meeting
of goals

Emotional well-being

Recognition of the interests that motivate
other people

Personal Values

Valuing self

Value of schooling and learning

Commitment to moral and ethical values

Valuing of other people

Appreciation of the arts and humanities

V. OPERATIONAL NEEDS

1. Children at Academy come first

2. Can't be a lone ranger - no orientation -

3. Must be a team - player
4. Interdisciplinary perspective must be brought into courses
5. Problem solving orientation
6. Sharing information - material - - Know what each other is teaching
7. Teachers visit each others classrooms
8. Development of IMSA models for problem solving
9. Publications, speakers

VI. SHARED VALUE - DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE OF IMSA

Deal and Kennedy define culture as "the way we do things around here" -

"integrated patterns of behavior that includes thought, speech, action and artifacts. Culture affects everything an organization does. We are building ours from scratch.

1. Common sense of mission and purpose
2. Collective sense of humor

3. Balance between high expectations and life as a child
4. Shared ownership of problems (faculty - students)
not mine - ours; especially in relation to children, rarely will a child exclusively own a problem;
5. Professionalism and respect
6. Partnership and collaboration;
participatory decision making
7. Willingness to take risks and deal with ambiguity
8. Accountability to group
9. Ownership is essential for maximum development of people
10. Sense of authenticity
11. Willingness to celebrate mistakes because they demonstrate that we have at least tried something
12. A strong sense of power among staff members to effect change.

13. Developing a positive self image in students
14. Belief that excellence is possible and that people want to grow and achieve
15. Trust in ourselves and each other is an essential ingredient for growth.
16. A willingness to dream
17. A passion for excellence - most people that come into the place are captivated by the intensity of energy and commitment in staff - one gal told Naomoi and I - "There's something almost "spiritual here"

In the introduction to THE PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE, the authors describe a conversation with the head of a very large scavenger company who was asked why he thought his company was the most successful garbage company in America. And Len Staffanali, chairman of Sunset Scavengers, looked very surprised and said very simply, "I love garbage," he said.

~~The authors then go on to say.~~ That's the image of this place - actually its the magic of the place -

Life begins then you're in to stay
you gotta love it. "When you have a true passion for excellence and when you act on it, you will stand straighter. You will look people in the eye. You will see things happen. You will see heroes created, and watch ideas unfold, and take shape. You will walk with a springier step. You will have something to fight for, to care about, to share, scary as it is, with other people. There will be times when you swing from dedicated to obsessed. We don't pretend that it is easy. It takes real courage to step out and stake your claim, but we think the renewed sense of purpose, of making a difference, of recovered self respect is well worth the price of admission."

VII. ATTITUDES/ORIENTATION WILL BE CRITICAL

There will be frustrations - either see them as problems or as opportunities and challenges - kind of a joke - Boy, do I have an opportunity for you."

Our attitude is critical - whether we believe we can or we believe we can't, we are right.

The critical importance of attitude was brought home recently by the story of the dancing toll-taker.

Dancing Toll-Taker

One day in 1984, headed for San Francisco, I drove up to a tollbooth. I heard loud rock music. Inside, the booth the attendant was dancing.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm having a party," he said.

"At eight-thirty every morning, live people enter those other tollbooths. At four-thirty, they re-emerge and go home. For eight hours, their brains are on hold. But I'm going to be a dancer someday, and this is my training."

5/14/84
A Foreman

A foreman at a Southern California thermodynamics plant explained why a unit of technicians who check temperatures and pressures on his plant's delicate equipment - a routine and repetitive job - have the lowest turnover rate in the company and a superb performance record. He pointed to the green surgical smocks they wore. "They are from my son, a cardiovascular surgeon," he said. "I told my men: 'We take care of these pipes the way a doctor takes care of your heart. There won't be any breakdowns in this plant as long as WE are working on its arteries.'"

With a mixture of humor and pride, they address each other as "Doctor".

My Background- Since the top person sets the tone in the organization - I think its only fair -

1. Born and raised in New York
8 years in Bronx and then Long Island
2. Went to college in PA for 2 years - pre med.
Then City College of New York - graduated BA in education and sociology: student taught in gifted classes in Harlem.
3. Moved to Chicago in 1967
Begin teaching 5th grade in Alsip, Illinois
Taught in same district for 7 years
5th and 6th grades and then 8th grade
Became social studies chairperson and district gifted coordinator and a national consultant for Holt in social studies and gifted.
Continued interest in gifted education
4. MA - University of Chicago - Philosophy of curriculum instruction/learning -(gifted)
Began to teach graduate classes in gifted education,

5. Administrative career began in 1974 in Naperville - Assistant Director of Curriculum and Gifted Coordinator
6. Batavia - Assistant Superintendent 1976 Superintendent - 1984
7. Ph.D. in 1983 - Loyola - Administration and Industrial Relations

On Staff of Loyola - supervising doctoral students and dissertations
8. Invited to join Board of CPEE in 1983 and then Academy started
9. Appointed to Academy Board by Ted Sanders in 1985
10. Resigned from Board in May when I applied for this position

Write - Culture -

I am an educator and a teacher. I am not a scientist.

I am a student of student learning and the instructional process and organizational development and leadership.

I believe that a knowledge of how people learn and how to orchestrate the conditions under which they

learn increases the likelihood that they will learn.

A part of that knowledge is understanding human motivation and self-concept development and having an understanding of a aesthetic appreciation for both the science and the art of teaching.

I am fascinated with why some organizations seem to work and others don't and my interest is in orchestrating the variables within an organization to empower people so that it does work.

Why I'm here? Probably the same reasons you are here.

- vision was compelling to develop something from scratch

- rare educational opportunity - that doesn't come along very often, if ever.

- believed in the need to establish this school for youngsters that I feel are in many ways as handicapped as children recognized with a more physical handicap.

- believed a group of people could rally the resources needed to pull it off.

My Style

1. Collaboration - participation - My door is not only usually open, you can come in, I will listen, we would not always agree - Staff of strong wills, but I will always listen to your perspective, especially if we disagree - internally I will ask myself and (I hope you will you too) - what if they are right?
2. High energy level and am task oriented - My work is my play -
3. Will send you notes very frequently and quite frankly they are not suggestions I don't usually forget what I write
4. No surprises - Not Lone Ranger, etc. Please keep me posted on what you are doing - and I will do the same - I must know what is happening. We need to be in constant communication.
5. Strong degree of accountability - expect work to be done but I am also not trying to run you and I know you do have a personal life. In beginning may seem like I am critical. Need to get used to you. Management style - need to know information; I am responsible; want to

Know what you are doing - Must talk to Joe and me.

6. Expectations - that each of us will help each other to become the best that we can be and mirror metaphor is reality - expect awareness - dress, speech, presentation, etc.

Report to Board of Trustees as their Chief Executive Officer

My Role

- Shape and orchestrate
- Build credibility among various constituencies - not everyone is your friend out there
- Mobilize resources and get the things you need to do the job.
- develop ownership; empower
- observe classes and instruction - what to do and what you are doing

I will teach you what I know - Information is power and the more, we have the better off we'll be

Questions I have - that we need to address

1. Content - what is really worth knowing - how do we balance AP expectations with the horizontal

enrichment and investigative experiences we know are important.

2. Evaluation Strategies

How will we assess students achievement, teacher instructional strategies, and administrative leadership

3. What strategies, provided will we use

4. Pacing/balance

How will we know if we are appropriately balancing information, investigation, and childhood

5. What will we use to show as evidence at end of year that we have accomplished what we set out to do?

6. What are our goals for this year - what is our mission and how will it be measured - either quantitatively or qualitatively that we have been successful.

John Dewey said that "every thinking person puts a stable world in peril." I hope this institution will always stand for honest reflection and inquiry about teaching, learning and children.

VIGNETTE OF 5

Next several days you will be receiving information about lots of things you need to know, you will also be most anxious to get into the classroom to prepare and set up -

The immediacy of your task and the shortness of the timeline will cause you to decide on today - don't forget about tomorrow.

Borden Mace, our Director of Development and previously our Interim Director, said something this year that impressed me greatly and that is--"What you call it, becomes what it is."

(Give example of biological research pond.)

Keep in mind--what you do now, and what you name and call it will affect what it becomes and how it is perceived.

I am delighted you are all here--the commonalities that join us are significant and I believe we will accomplish great things!

Illinois is 4N for a travel