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whole elephants

Lewis A. Rhodes

Fax MEMO

814 Lamberton Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20902-3037
Phone/Fax: 301-649-1296
E-mail: lewrhodes@AOL.com

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TO: (name)   **(Superintendent)**

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When you go to the store to buy a drill
it's hard to remember that what you really want is a hole! - Anonymous

(XXXX):

I'm looking forward to Thursday's Executive Team meeting because I've had few opportunities to observe what's been happening, and how its been happening, since the budget-driven rethinking processes began.

So, let me take advantage of the freedom given me by having no on-the-ground data to go on, and use my perch on this *20,000* ft. cloud to share some ideas that may, or may not, add meaning to what has already happened or may yet happen. On the surface, it may seem to deal with OGAT and OSA (especially the *IMS* and the *SSA*), but the issue is a deeper one. And the rest of this memo and attachment focuses on that.

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When I first read of the shift in responsibility for the *SSA* to somewhere under your wing (I'm still not sure where), my reaction was…"What an opportunity!" This may seem strange, but here is why, and why these ideas have special meaning for me.

When AASA hired me as Associate Executive Director, *Instructional Leadership & Technology,* two areas not usually seen as *directly* related became my focus. Without going into the number and variety of different products that emerged through the understandings generated by that different lens, there is one from 1989 that I am attaching -- Strategic Technology Concepts. Its purpose was (1) to shift people's focus from "technology" to the nature of the *information* it can generate and make accessible. And (2) to show how that information was the system-leader's most powerful tool.

As I wrote at the time.

> Pity the poor Superintendent/CEO! Thanks to folks like Senge and others who have made us aware of "systems thinking," we have tools that address the need to deal with the scope of schools problems - e.g. *strategic planning.* But have few tools that directly deal with the nature of the problem -- a system's need to act as a system.

> "System acting" involves the individual parts of the system taking actions based on the support and understanding of the whole. It gets its power from the natural connectedness of a system. System acting tools empower the inter-relationships in the system's work by using the *open exchange of information* to create and sustain them.

As I re-read these ideas again (and recall my continuing frustration finding ways to have people take them seriously) I am aware of two things.

• First, how many of them already have been validated by actions MCPS has taken, or seems to be taking.

• And second, that the culture that limits acting on some of these ideas still exists in and around the system. And this is what prompted my reaction to the change in thinking about where the *SSA* "fits" (regardless of why the change was made).

The power in these ideas loses a level of meaning when, for management reasons, *information* and *information technology* get compartmented. They usually are embedded in separate organizational silos either by the purpose to which it will be used - e.g., "evaluation." Or by the way the information will be moved or exchanged - e.g., "technology."

One unfortunate consequence as an example: "feedback" loses its importance and meaning as the driver for continually-more effective decision-making at *all* levels when it becomes relegated to a sub-category "formative" under "evaluation and assessment." At times I've seen this cultural blind spot directly limit some natural areas of collaboration between OGAT and OSA.

My reason for sharing this piece now (without any "data" to suggest anyone might want to read it) is the possibility it might add some new meaning as you all seem to be re-thinking relationships.

For example, there can be some direct connections between the I*MS'* feedback potentials and the *SSA*'s need to operationalize and regularize "formative assessment." This particular strategy would have a benefit that most "technology" strategies do not. <u>The technology would no longer be just a *cost* item, but (as in industry) something that *adds value* across the work of the entire organization</u>.

When you go to the store to buy technology
it's hard to remember that what you really want is information

One final thought: At the 11/13/01 Board meeting, you said that you were trying to "(reduce expenditures) while keeping a "<u>commitment</u> to the classroom, a <u>systemic</u> approach, and <u>continual improvement</u>." This approach to information use can provide a way to act on the commitment to all three by helping to <u>ask different questions</u> from this *information*-focused perspective:

"Commitment to classroom" -- To whose decisions and choices do we align information flow? Who needs access to the data *first*?

"A systemic approach" -- <u>Who has</u> information the classroom/building needs? <u>Who needs</u> information the classroom/building has?

"Continual improvement" -- What <u>processes</u> ensure that data and information are used to help each person do their best each time… and a little bit better the next?