Back in the olden days, like the 50’s and 60’s, the Sunday night television ritual in my family consisted of watching the Ed Sullivan Show. On our one black-and-white TV,( my parents finally got color when I went off to college), a wide range of human entertainment was on display for our enjoyment. Always a classical artist or two. When was the last time you saw an opera diva the on national TV, except for pledge week on PBS. I remember that night when my parents shook their heads in amazement when the Beatles made the first American appearance, shortly followed by the much more outrageous Rolling Stones. I learned that with a ballpoint pen you could make a hand puppet that could amuse a squirmy child on a long trip from Senor Wences. Have I used that skill in airports and on planes. But after this week at Lafayette, I especially remember the many juggling acts that seem to be on with great regularity, especially the one with the spinning plates on sticks. Up and down the stage the jugglers ran trying to keep the plates spinning. More and more sticks and plates were added until it seemed impossible that any more could be added. And then the final flourish as the sticks were grabbed, the plates flung into the air and caught. Lastly came the admonition from my mother that we were never, ever to try this ourselves. Those were special plates and sticks. So we never did.

I think about what teaching and running a school has become and in many ways we all at Lafayette are running around with spinning plates on sticks. Which plates to me need to keep up in the air? Of course reading, writing and math, but for how long? What do we do with the students who learn with just a few spins and what do we do with the ones that need so many more? We think is important the children have a break during the day so we spin a plate for recess and lunch. All schools in the system have lunch, but fewer and fewer are having much time for recess. All morning 15 min. break that may include a snack is unheard of among my colleagues. But we think that maybe important. We try to meet the needs of what new research tells us are the multiple intelligences of human beings by adding in art, music, and physical education. We make sure the nurse gets to fit in hearing and vision screenings. We take time to participate in assemblies and plays both as performers and audiences. We talk about being nice, having good manners, and how to play with your classmates. All these plates spinning each and every day

In another way where like the jugglers on Ed Sullivan. Eventually the music would start amd the routine would be over. No matter what was happening, there was another act to go on or another commercial to see. We are also prisoners of time. We start at 8:45 and end at 3:15. And by golly we better end at 3:15. The most irate comments I get at the end of the day are about children leaving the building late. Apparently you also have a lot of plates spinning that need to be tended. In my job as principal, as well as with the most of yours, there opportunities to keep working, finish up later or take work home with you. Yes, teachers can do some of the things with the products your children create, or with lesson planning, but not with the children. The bell rings and off they go, whether they got all the spins they needed that day or not. So we try to build into the day extra time for children who need a few more spins. We have teachers who work with those children to give them the extra support they need. But we have bells to follow during the day. So much time for this, so much time for that. Be here at a certain time. Pick up your class on time. Like a TV show, the word ‘cut’, whether spoken or not, is a part of our plates spinning day.

This week at Lafayette students in grades two through five are taking another set of benchmark exams. Another plate to spin. Fourth and fifth grade students need to take the test on computers now. We have a limited number so we now have to schedule testing over many, many more days. We like to test in the morning but find that almost impossible so some grades are testing now in the afternoon. Last week, and as I write this it could be this week as well, we've had serious issues with our telephone system at the school. I must admit I really did not miss hearing the phone ring all day long. It's now up and running in the main office but that really is a plate that spins all day long. And as much as Imight think the telephone is an issue, the doorbell a bigger one. Last week the system that allows Mrs. Bright to let you into the school building was finally moved closer to her desk. She no longer has to jump up and go walking across the office every time the doorbell rings. Hopefully that will let her stop spinning a few of her plates in her busy day.

The television variety show seems to be a dinosaur now. Reality shows, especially the ones that seem the most extreme, seem to be what is popular. Our reality is that we are in many ways that old time variety show. We have so many different subjects to teach to so many viewers with so many different interests and starting places. We have so many audiences to please, both in school and out. We have new programming coming, new materials to use, new technology to incorporate into the day. We have new tests to take. With all that is new, we still have the standard six-hour format that DCPS has used for generations. To keep all our plates spinning it takes time and planning. It takes lots of teacher conversations. It takes lots of conversations with you. But we know we can do it. Because as Ed Sullivan also taught me every week, we are part of a ‘really big shoe’. Teaching and learning at Lafayette.