

CREATING A CULTURE OF FACULTY DEVELOPMENT (OR NINE KEY PRINCIPLES TO EFFECTIVE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT)

by Bryan Lynch, Veritas School

*A transcription from Bryan's workshop at the
2015 Leader's Day pre-conference in Dallas, Texas.*

This presentation has grown out of my experience both as a classroom teacher and as a school administrator. I was also a founding board member of Veritas School in Newberg, Oregon. I'm hopeful that you will find this helpful as you develop your faculty development plans. This is what we do out in Oregon; it's relatively isolated out there in the Northwest. There's probably plenty of things that you are doing that we should be doing.

In a recent ISM (Independent School Management) publication, there was an item on the cost of faculty culture that is not focused on growth. Some of you may have seen this so I want to quote a bit of it. "Management teams that do not successfully build a quality faculty culture will eventually experience enrollment decline. An unhealthy faculty culture leads to turnover, typically of the best teachers." (That's the part that scares me the most, right?) Human resource experts largely agree that employee turnover affects the bottom line in significant ways: recruiting, lowered productivity, overworked remaining staff, increased training costs. Excellent teachers want to work with other excellent teachers.

They want to work in schools where other teachers want to get better and where the whole faculty wants to get better. If we don't do that, then we risk losing them—they only stay around so long. So that's one of the whys. Why do we care about developing faculty culture? Well, it's to keep our best teachers; the best teachers are what makes our schools grow and what makes our schools worth being at. It's student retention and it's also quality of teachers. That allows us to fulfill our mission. Without those excellent teachers, we don't get to do what we want to do.

I won't talk a lot about Christ-centeredness as I go through this, but that's assumed. The second assumption is that teachers are chiefly what we have to offer. Our schools are our teachers—who they are. What they do in and out of the classroom is really what we have. Some of you have marvelous facilities, I know. Curriculum, programs, all of those things are wonderful and good and necessary of course. But nothing tops the value of your classroom teachers. So, that needs to be a tremendous focus. Therefore, it seems to me, that the main task of

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school leaders is the development of teachers. If teachers are who we have to offer and what we have to offer, then it should be one of our main tasks to develop teachers and to grow them. I'm assuming that as we go.

We, of course, keep the lights on. Administrators keep the bills paid and those things are important. Otherwise, your school closes, right? But the focus on the mission and on teacher growth, getting faculty to buy into that—that they need to grow as a whole faculty—to me, that's the main key.

Like many schools, our location has caused us to be sure we focus on teacher growth internally. We are out there in the Northwest. We can't send everyone to ACCS or SCL, or other wonderful training. We are bringing people in all the time. So, we've spent a lot of time developing internally and consistently turning our attention to faculty development. It's something that we think is very, very important and we spend a lot of time working on it.

So, if it's true that the administrators' job is to develop teachers, it's true of teachers, too. Their main responsibility is to grow as teachers. Some people may think that teachers are mainly employed to teach subjects to children. While that's a big part of their day, actually, we chiefly pay them to grow as people and as teachers. We pay them to learn and to grow. Yes, they have to be in the classroom to do the things they do. And they think that's their full-time job. Teach third grade. Really, their full-time job is to grow as people and as teachers. So, I'm assuming that as we go through this.

The last assumption is that we develop our school-wide faculty development plan each year based on our mission, the board's strategic plan, administrative goals, etc. The teachers have individual plans as well.

Let's look at some principles that underpin how we think about faculty development—those “five ways to improve your school.” I'm a sucker for those things on the internet. “The nine key essential . . . well, what is that?” I click on it. Invariably, eight things are “we are

already doing that, but maybe there's that one thing.” Maybe we should retitle this “Nine Key Principles to Effective Faculty Development.” That's the new title.

Principle 1: Effective faculty development is *mission focused*. Maybe we should assume this, but I think this needs to be up front. Everything we do in developing our faculty as a whole must be deliberately supportive of the mission. It's got to be mission-focused. Whatever your particular mission statement is, we all have similar kinds of things. Ours is “cultivating wisdom, virtue, and godliness.” With everything we do we ask, does this really meet that?—such as our portrait of a graduate, our characteristics of teaching excellence. Everything that we do in our teacher training and in our broader faculty growth plan has to fit the mission. We can't do everything that is worthwhile. There are lots and lots of things out there that we could be doing, lots of programs, and plans, and things that might be good in some ways. But what is it that best fits the mission? Everything must be evaluated by the mission. I keep repeating that, but I think that is the number one thing we have to keep in mind.

We need to communicate this frequently to the faculty, explaining why what we are doing is supporting this mission. *Leaders are reminders*, I read somewhere the other day. That's not new. It struck me again that's really our chief job, to remind people—in our organization, parents, teachers, students—why we are doing what we are doing. So when we are doing faculty development, it's important to continually remind people that this is how this fits the mission so they understand it, and they can make that part of their own thinking as well, and also pass it on to parents and students.

We get to focus on the big picture of the mission, both what to do and what to avoid. Again, there are plenty of things that we could do that we just don't have time for. That might be a distraction. We think about balancing philosophical and practical, the old and the new. We want to avoid reverse chronological

snobbery and just not focus on old things. We look at contemporary educational research as well—carefully, very carefully. We talked about that just because it's new, it's bad, or good. It doesn't work like that. So we want a broad range of things. Again the main thing is does it fit the mission? Can this new piece of research that just came out, can it help us support this mission? Then we will look at it. If not, we'll ignore it and we will view the things that we know work.

For example, during our Thursday morning readings, we are going through an edition of Quintilian which is on speech and writing. I think it's books 1, 2, and 10—just a small edition of Quintilian. We are reading through that together as a faculty and discussing it. We're just reading it out loud; it's not like homework. Twenty minutes in the morning, read and discuss. That's our Thursday morning meeting.

Our monthly meetings, our after-school meetings, have been taken up with a book called the *Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning* by Jan Chappuis. That's a contemporary book that we have been going through. We are also starting to relook at *The Seven Laws of Teaching*. It's been a few years since we've read through *Seven Laws of Teaching* and so we are picking that up starting this spring and that will go on until next year. We have an ancient source, we have a nineteenth-century source, and we have a twenty-first century source. But as long as they fit our mission, then we are OK with it. We are really, really pretty careful about what we adopt. So, we are *mission focused* in faculty development.

Secondly, effective faculty development should be *student learning and student growth centered*. The whole point of this is that it should have a clear impact on students, academics, but also school culture. That doesn't have to mean that it is an immediate or obvious impact. But we really want to focus on the students. Again, maybe some of that's obvious but sometimes we can go off on programs or curriculum or focus on teachers. We really want to make sure that we are

thinking about students. The measure of success of faculty development, I think, is the students. What's the impact on their understanding and growth? For us, it's their growth in wisdom, virtue, and godliness. We have to constantly think about that. We use a version of the ISM student experience profile, the student survey. We use a version of that we developed and we do this every year with our students. This year we took a couple of items off of that to include in our faculty development plan for next year. Through that survey, we saw that our score for predictability and supportiveness was a bit down. The survey question was: "Teachers have worked every day helping me become a more wise, virtuous, and godly person." Our score for being supported and predictable were down, which is really an indicator of teacher interaction with students everyday, and a real indicator of student retention as well. If students aren't feeling supported, and if they don't know what their teacher is going to be like today, eventually, they trickle away. That score needs some shoring up so we have been looking at ways that we can boost that score. The point is that it's student growth. Now, I didn't say *student centered*. What I mean is student *learning*, not "if the student wants it, that's what we do." Students are what we are about, but they do not get to determine what we do.

Thirdly, effective faculty development is consistent in *measuring teacher and student actions*. Part of what we want to measure is what the teachers do. We know what actions teachers do in the classroom that are effective and lead to more learning. We know the kinds of things that students should do. There's a long list of things. If your teachers do these things in the classroom and they have students do these things, students will learn. As part of our training, we want to try to measure that as part of our ongoing growth and development.

We have to be careful to not just look at summative or standardized testing. That's like an autopsy. At the end of the year you get the standardized testing scores and you see what the health of the patient was after they are

dead. They are gone already. I know you can use those numbers for next year and there's lots of good reasons for using standardized testing, but besides that, we are really interested in measuring student actions as we go—measuring student health and teacher health on an ongoing basis so we can keep them healthy and not have to worry about just doing the autopsy at the end.

For example, I do frequent walk throughs through the classrooms of ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, maybe shorter. Frequently. On my evaluation form, I'm looking for things that we know lead to greater student learning. Things like lesson planning ahead of time, that is student learning focused, not just content focused. What will the student do with the learning? I'm looking to see that there is modeling of strong and weak work, that there is regular descriptive feedback, those kinds of thing. I'm looking for those kinds of teacher actions and student actions on an ongoing basis. We are trying to measure, and again, I've done charts and we've looked at the numbers and done statistical analysis. That's been sort of helpful, but mainly it's having us understand, as a faculty, what we are looking for.

Related to that has been developing a common vocabulary or a common understanding of good practice. We use terms like “backward planning” and “learning targets” and “checking for understanding.” I know that those terms sometimes import problematic ideas within so you have to be careful what you use in your school. But we use those as a kind of shorthand—we are not necessarily buying the philosophy. Try to work in the common vocabulary of all your teachers. What is it that's good teaching practice? Then, when we are talking together we have a common understanding. Are you checking for understanding? Are you using formative assessment? You don't have to say, “Are you checking for how they are doing . . . ?” You don't have to use a long phrase—you can just use short hand. The walk-through reports are connected; they have those kinds of terms on it. We use this and it gives immediate

(or we try to give immediate) feedback so teachers can use it. Part of the effectiveness of feedback is getting it quickly so teachers can act on it. I just started using Google Docs—I know I'm way, way behind the curve on it! I had previously used a paper form, then I used something that was on my phone. But trying to type in the comments on the phone was just too cumbersome. So I'm using Google Docs, which allows me, of course, to share quickly. I fill out the form, I do the feedback on Google Docs, I share it with them immediately. They can look at it during their prep period if they want to or after I leave the classroom. We can go back and forth with comments and questions. I just started doing this but I think that's going to be very, very helpful. I would prefer to have a 15 to 20 minute observation, then later have the teacher come in so we can talk for a half hour about what I saw, but that's just impossible to do. There's not enough time in the day to do that. I try to do 20 walk throughs each quarter. Maybe some of you could do many more than that; I'd love to do more than that, but even 20 can sometimes be difficult. Using this form, using Google Docs, we are able to have somewhat of an interactive conversation about what I saw. They get feedback that they can immediately act on, and ask questions or make clarifications if they need to.

Fourthly, effective faculty development is focused on *people and practices*, not on programming. Implementation is the key. Do teachers actually use what's being emphasized this past year? If you think back the last couple years in your faculty development plan, are they actually using it? Is it improving the classroom? Is it having an impact on student learning and student action? It's not just a program. I don't know too many people that are tempted by that but sometimes we buy into something and we are just going to do it regardless. Does it fit our people, our students, our context right now? Maybe this isn't a good fit. Keep in mind that it's people, not programs. Programs are great but we want to focus on our people. Staying flexible is important,

being willing to shift the training as needed.

This year, based on our discussions with the secondary teachers (I'm also the head of the secondary and I lead those meetings), we began viewing the Paul Tripp DVD series, *Our Christian Schools: Culture of Grace?* We had done some Tripp stuff a couple of years ago, but it's been awhile since we've done that. I think the content is related to that predictability and supportiveness score. How can we be more gracious? How can we bump that score up? This wasn't on the original plan, but as we discussed it over the last several months, we picked that up late this spring and we will continue that into next year. Staying flexible wasn't on the program initially but the people at our point in time needed that.

Fifthly, effective faculty development is committed to *teacher buy-in*. This is important; we need to make sure that we make it useful in their classrooms. As you know, of all the things teachers resent in their school, they most resent loss of time. It's always a time battle. They are willing to give up time, but you better make sure that whatever meetings you are doing is not a waste of time. If there is only one point I could make here, it's don't waste their time. Make sure it's worthwhile. Useful doesn't have to be pragmatic—I don't mean that. Increased philosophical understanding is very, very useful in the long run. I don't mean that you have to apply it Monday morning, but they need to see the usefulness of it. Make sure it helps them to grow and understand mission better. This goes back to leaders being reminders. We are doing this because it will help you grow in understanding the mission. Very few teachers in my school aren't interested in understanding classical education better. I think they all want to know it better. What is this all about? How do we do it? Make sure that whatever we are doing is committed to that; we are not wasting their time. Make sure it helps them to grow professionally and they see themselves and each other growing professionally.

That's really important—they are in this community of teachers that are also all growing. Think about using teachers as leaders as well, as presenters for leading faculty development. At our curriculum day in January, for example, we had two of our leaders give a presentation on formative assessment strategies—one elementary teacher and one secondary teacher. They are very, very good at weaving in formative assessment in their classrooms. I asked them to do the presentation. It was great. They did a wonderful job and other teachers, who already respected these two teachers, could see that they really were experts and it created conversation amongst the staff that maybe wouldn't have been there before. Two of our other teachers led us in an introduction to a curriculum mapping program that we adopted recently. It was their idea. It wasn't me, the administrator, saying, "We are going to do curriculum mapping now. Here it is; do it." The two teachers came to me and said, "We think this would be great for all of us to know in a much easier way what everybody's doing about everything." That's the idea behind curriculum mapping. So they came to me and said, "We want to do this." "Great, would you please lead the presentation?" They organized it, they did all the background work, they led the presentation. This spring they led us all in implementing that as well. So, getting teachers as part of the process can help with the teacher buy-in.

Sixthly, I think that effective faculty development should be *prioritized by the top administration*. We need to show that faculty development is a priority through the allocation of limited resources. That's what our job really is—it's resource allocation. That's the job description of the administrator. We have limited resources, time, money, and energy. You can't put your whole heart into everything all the time. As leaders, we have to make sure that resources are allocated properly. We prioritize. We set the priorities and teachers need to see that this is a priority as well, in the budget and in the time allotted.

It is important to make sure that all regular meetings have some significant time devoted to faculty growth, to faculty development. Sometimes, there are emergency meetings when you just have to deal with an issue. But some significant time has to be devoted to faculty growth in every monthly meeting. Now, if things can be dealt with in email, do it that way. There will be announcements; you have to do that sometimes. I don't know what significant means—for you it's going to be different. Every school is different—for us it's more than half the time of the meeting. We have an hour or an hour and 15 minute meeting, three times a week. More than half of that time is spent talking about some part of our faculty growth plan. I wish it were more. Teachers come in at 3:15 p.m. and they are pretty tired and the last thing they want to do is to start into some type of philosophical discussion. But it doesn't take very long until they are energized again because they really want to grow as teachers. They want to understand what they are doing better so that's a much better situation. Do all of your meetings have some significant time devoted to growth?

Training should be clearly encouraged, even frequently led by the top administration. It shouldn't be something that teachers do while the administrators are in the office. I know that everybody's school structures are different, so not all of the head administrators are also the academic people. I'm not saying that every head of school must lead all the faculty development. I'm not proposing that at all, but they should at least be there and be visibly supportive. The teachers should understand that this is not just the academic thing while the business thing is over there. Rather, all administrators support what we are doing. It would be good for administrators once in awhile to lead as well as they are able to do that. For sure, it should be a priority and be seen as a priority.

Effective faculty development is *committed to encouraging teachers who are dedicated to personal and professional growth and learning*. Don't be afraid

to commit disproportionately to your best teachers. This was hard for me to get used to at first coming from my background where everything was equal. If this department got something, then this department wanted it. Everybody was fighting over it, getting their resources. Don't be afraid (maybe don't advertise it) if you have really, really excellent teachers to send them on extra things, or give them extra training, or have them take a class, or give them extra books, or whatever it happens to be. That's OK. Everyone has opportunity, but your really best teachers, they need more opportunity in some ways to grow. They want that; they need it. They will be willing to do more things.

I think it's a good model for other teachers as well. They see other teachers really taking off in their own growth, prioritizing learning, and always getting better. Those who maybe need a little more encouragement to do that will see that and hopefully become more like that. It's not like it's a budget priority or a goal of mine to give more money to certain teachers, but I'm not afraid to do that if it comes up. I haven't sent anybody to Italy yet to work on their Latin, but some schools have done that. I know a teacher who would like to do that; maybe that will happen some day.

Publicly reinforce professional growth achievements through newsletters or just in your meetings. One of the things that we do in our monthly meetings is discuss each teachers personal, professional plan—not every teacher, every time—but they will share what they are doing in their personal growth. Are you familiar with the MFE, the ISM MFE set-up, meaningful faculty evaluations? We have another name for it now but it's just personal goal setting. So we talk about those things in meetings as well.

Unfortunately, I think we have to prepare, then, to remove those who are not committed to ongoing growth. That's the unfortunate reality. We want to push those who are just getting along. We want to give opportunities to those who are really growing. But for

those who won't grow, or can't, for whatever reason, we have to be prepared to counsel them out of the profession. They should be serving God somewhere else; this is not the place for them apparently. That may take awhile. I'm not saying go home and cut the bottom ten percent of your work force. I've heard that kind of thing. I'm not suggesting that at all. But the assumption is that none of us have arrived. No school here has arrived. None of you administrators or teachers are final. I think that there are probably very few classical in our midst who call ourselves classical, Christian schools, who look back on what classical schools were doing 300 years ago. We are a long, long way from that, most of us. I can't speak for your school, but my school is not really classical—although we use that term. We are closer than most other people, but we certainly haven't arrived.

As you know, complacency is toxic. The people that are complacent—or they think they have arrived but are just not able to do it—you just have to counsel them out. Yes, we want to commit to and support those that are growing, but on the other hand we might have to eventually ask someone else to find something else to do. That is a reality.

We want to be committed to *focused, sustained, and consistent faculty development*. It takes patience. We want to provide opportunities for application, and reflection, collaboration over time, and for the long haul. This is not going to happen quickly. In fact, most really good things in faculty growth are not going to happen really quickly—they take time. Again, that's sort of the flip side to what I just talked about, the teacher who wasn't growing. We can be patient, but up to a point. Choose wisely and keep at it; be patient.

I did a recent survey of our teachers on our professional development plan. The most common comment was their desire for more time to work together, to discuss, and to collaborate. They just want more time to do that. I'm not sure how to do it. They also want to teach all day and then they want to collaborate. I

know schools are doing things like taking an early release every week, or having quarterly curriculum days. Those kinds of things are excellent. We'll be looking at ways that we can build this time into an already busy schedule. Is there also time to collaborate? How do we build that in? We want to make sure that we are doing this in a sustained and consistent way, providing opportunities and keeping in mind that it might take years of practice and reinforcement from you, the leaders, to make these ideas permanent in a faculty.

When I first started talking about student action objectives, student action-centered objectives written as "the students will be able to . . ." kind of structure, it took awhile to get some of our teachers over that, to change their mindset. As teachers, we tend to be activity oriented, or content oriented. My goal for the day is to . . . do this thing with the French Revolution. Well, that's not really the goal. The goal is that the students would know the French Revolution. So it's shifting that thinking. Sometimes that takes time; that takes patience. It takes repetition and reinforcement. Think about compound interest over time. Over time it builds and grows, so sticking with it will grow and will pay.

Connected with that is avoiding too much change or variety. Introduce and implement carefully to avoid fatigue or even cynicism. I don't suspect that you have much cynicism in your school but maybe you have some skepticism about the new thing. Where I used to teach there was plenty of cynicism. The new superintendent would come in, or the new principal would come in, and they would have their new plan. They would last three years and be gone. The grizzled old veterans would say, "Just wait, kid, he'll be gone in three years and we'll be on to something else." It was true. They were right. Just do what you do and it will blow over. They were a very, very cynical lot. I don't experience that in my school and I'm sure you don't either. But you can wear people out with all the new ideas. You'll come to this conference, and you'll spend three days here, and you'll have a ton

of new ideas, and you'll go back home. And your people will say, "Ah, he must have been to the conference. Look at all the new stuff." So, we need to be careful.

On that same survey, one teacher—it was only one—but one teacher did say, "The least helpful part of our faculty development is that we have too many balls in the air at once. We've got too many things going." We had our accreditation visit last year, so there was that. They were very nervous; I wasn't nervous, but they were, of course, nervous about that. And there's teacher certification, now that we have been accredited and are required to do that. And then I've got seven strategies, and then I've got four assessments. We've got too many balls in the air and that's my fault, it's true. We get to drop the accreditation ball this year. I think we are going to be OK. It's something to be aware of. You can fatigue teachers; you can wear them out. They do, in fact, have to teach all day long and then you've got your thing that you want them to do to. Find a way to weave that in seamlessly into what they are doing in the classroom so it's not an extra thing—it should support what they are doing in the classroom, not add to it. You don't want to just pile on more stuff.

Lastly, we want to make sure that our faculty development is *concerned with developing overall "situational awareness,"* or self-consciousness, or mainly a professional judgment. The ultimate goal is their growth in professional judgment. We use a lot of scenarios and situations, particularly in our secondary staff discussions. We've done it in the elementary as well. The point of that is not that they'll know what to do when they face that situation—they are never going to face that exact situation. The point is for us to step back, look at a situation, and diagnose before we start prescribing the solution. It's really easy for teachers to say there's a solution, I know how to fix it, and away we go. We have to do that as teachers hundreds of times a day. Situation, read it, go. So we try to step back, spend some time looking at a scenario, talk about it for 35 minutes,

and diagnose all the possible things that might be going on before we start talking about a solution.

That's just one way of trying to reach that main point of growing their professional judgment so they don't need you as administrators. That would be the goal, right? You don't have to be in the classroom. Of course, that will never arrive. Teachers always need feedback. They always need administrators to care and talk with them. Even if they are 100%, they still want that. So you are always going to be necessary. We want to try to move them more and more toward developing their own professional judgment so they can do those things or be leaders in the school as well.

Editor's note:

This concludes the first section of Bryan's workshop. ACCS-member schools may access the Mp3 recording of the entire workshop at <http://accsedu.org/school-resources/2015-1997-conference-audio-recordings->.