



Effective Grammar School Teaching & Leadership with Lori Jill Keeler

Lesson 12: Building a Culture of Learning in a Grammar School

Outline:

Building a Culture of Learning in a Grammar School

Leading with a Limp

- 2 Cor. 12:9: But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
- This role is difficult; we are not capable of doing this on our own.
- We should boast in our weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon us.
- All the ways I help and serve well is Christ in me; those things I do poorly are me. Our identity is in Christ.
- When you admit your weaknesses and are OK with that, you will endear yourself to others.



Leading with Learning

- What am I learning?
- What am I teaching?
- What are the results?
- “Employ your time in improving yourself by other men’s writings, so that you shall gain easily what others have labored hard for.” –Socrates
- **Devote 20% of your time** to either training or being trained.
- Read a lot, read widely:
 - teaching methodology
 - shepherding children’s hearts
 - parenting
 - content knowledge
 - the books the students read
- The leader of the school needs to be **the leading learner**.
- We can only teach others if we are learning ourselves.



- Keep up with and increase **your instructional expertise**.
- Ask your board to invest in your instructional leadership training; it will result in a rich return.
- **If you skimp on your training, you spend more of your time on solving problems you might have prevented.**
- If you are not training your teachers in the things that are important to you, then you will be solving problems that emerge because of this lack in training (parent complaints, hiring new teachers, etc.)
- Invest big in training because **training is ultimately less expensive than problem-solving.**
- Ultimately our leadership will be judged as effective or ineffective not by my own actions but by what I have produced in others; “my biggest success is the success of the people I have taught.”
- Foster leadership in others; form academic teams with leaders and mentor relationships.
- How do I produce leaders of leaders? Therefore, keep asking “What am I learning?”
- **What are the biggest areas in which I can have an impact?** Where are the holes? What teachers need help? Intentionally serve and work where the biggest impact can be made.
- Train teachers and parents about the culture of the school to help them understand the value of classical Christian education.
- **Partnership with Parents:** “Partnering with the principal.” Every fall and spring Lori Jill has meetings with each grade level of parents: mission and vision-casting. Remind parents of why they came. Ask for suggestions for how the school can be improved. Use books like Mindset and Shepherding the Child’s Heart with the parents. Talk about boy-girl relationships, social media, and technology. Lori Jill used to have the meetings in her home. Host a “thank you” luncheon for sixth-grade parents.

Intentionality and Purpose

- Mission and Vision
- Culture and Climate
- Curriculum
- “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.” — Alice in Wonderland.
- **Mission and Vision**
 - A purposeful community is not an accidental community.
 - We have come together for a deep, meaningful purpose.
 - The activities of the school need to be aimed at serving and fulfilling the purpose of our mission statements; we should assess our activities for how they serve or don’t serve our mission.
 - We should be intentional in developing habits of the soul and mind.



- How are your activities and culture supporting or detracting from your mission and vision?
- What stakeholders will you talk with about this?
- **Culture and Climate**
 - Be intentional about the culture and climate of your school.
 - What should the climate of my school be? What I do to change it?
 - Lori Jill wanted “students to breathe the air of grace.” Students should be seen, known, and loved.
 - Lori Jill takes photos of all 48 incoming Kindergarten students, learns all their names, and prays for them by name. She does the same thing with the parents.
 - Lori Jill’s favorite part of the day is welcoming students into the school with warm greetings, hugs, prayer, etc. Her teachers do the same thing in their classrooms. They focus heavily in their training on how to shepherd children’s hearts.
 - The gospel is the hub of every wheel at the school. How is the gospel preminent throughout the school?
- **Curriculum**
 - Backward design; look at our portrait of a graduate and work towards it beginning in K.
 - How to integrate a biblical worldview throughout the curriculum?
 - You will have to be conversant with the curriculum questions and concerns that your teachers might have.

Improving Instruction

- Regular Observation and Feedback
- Shared Academic Language
- Growth Mindset
- Best Practices
- “If advertisers spend the same amount of money improving their products as they do on advertising, they wouldn’t have to advertise.” –Will Rogers
- What is the most important thing to do to advance student learning? Improve teacher’s effectiveness. Help them to:
 - Understand the classical philosophy
 - Masters of teaching strategy
 - Understand a biblical worldview
 - Conversant, have depth, in content areas
- **The Primacy of Improving the Instruction of Teachers**
 - It reasonable to expect that every teacher will increase his or her expertise from year to year. Even the best teachers should be better the next year. “Improvement is necessary.”
 - “My job is to produce gains in teacher expertise which will in turn produce gains in student achievement.”



- If your school does many things right—there are many things that can be done better. “The hungry attitude of continuous improvement.”
Japanese word: Kaizen
- **Regular Observation and Feedback**
 - How can you help improve the instruction of your teachers? Regularly observe teachers and offer formative feedback. Visit as much as possible.
 - Teachers should know that you are not there just to be critical. “I am on your side. My job is to make you better.” This does not mean giving false praise; give them ways to improve (your goal).
- **Shared Academic Language**
 - We have used the academic language in *Teach Like a Champion*. You need to be doing more “cold calls.” Cf. Stretching it; No opt out.
- **Have a Growth Mindset**
 - It is very important for me to believe that my teachers can and will improve.
 - Be conversant with best practices educationally. Study the research and compare and balance with the classical tradition of education and Christian belief.

Leading Cultural Change

- Four Imperatives:
 - Define what will not change.
 - Well done is better than well said.
 - Use the right change tools for your current culture.
 - Recognize that change requires commitment.
- “Commitment is an action not a word.” Jean-Paul Sartre
- Cultures are not created overnight or by writing down a plan. It develops and grows through an accumulation of actions, ceremonies, rituals, symbols that are aligned with the vision.
- Changing culture is one of the principal’s hardest jobs and requires commitment. Michael Fullan says it takes 10 years to become an expert at your school. Most school leaders don’t stay on the job long enough to effect that lasting change.
- Define what will not change: Regardless of x, this will not change.
- Well done is better than well said: This means underselling and overdelivering. Don’t say every student will be a superstar. We need a blend of the ideal (portrait of a graduate) and the real.
- Use the right change tools for your current culture: Ceremonies, activities, etc.
- Recognize that change requires commitment: It is difficult to turn a ship. If you have drifted away from your mission, it takes a while to “right a ship.”
- MYTHS DEBUNKED
 - Just a little bit better is good enough



- You can plan your way to greatness
- Teachers are excited about changing
- Teachers love to collaborate
- Leaders can change cultures by themselves
- "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." –Frederick Douglass
- **Just a little bit better is good enough:** We need high standards that we are always seeking to reach.
- **You can plan your way to greatness:** Many past, departed leaders did not know how to put actions to their words. They were those who could talk, but not act, nor move others to act.
- **Teachers are excited about changing:** Grammar school teachers don't score high on "change." Therefore you must woo them to see that change is necessary. Some teachers may need to get off the bus or be put in another seat. You must give grammar school teachers a compelling reason to change.
- **Teachers love to collaborate:** There are many teachers who are content to be left alone
- Lori Jill requires teachers plan together; grade level teachers hand in one set of lesson plans (that all the teachers share). Teachers collaborate on tests, assignments, activities, etc. It is best for teachers and for students.
- Collaboration helps with student placement because all students get the same training.
- At first, teachers may not want to collaborate but will grow to see the benefit.
- Collaboration helps teachers in different grades to know how to prepare for the coming grade and work across grades with other teachers.
- **Leaders can change cultures by themselves:** The leader is important for cultural change, but you must invest in others who will work for change.

Making the Most Impact

- **School Climate:** Prospective parents look at this. Should be vibrant and warm; secure, engaged, loved students.
- **Professional development:** Consistent professional development needed. Faculty meetings are for training and professional development NOT logistics. Housekeeping items, schedules, etc. All logistical and informational items are sent in a weekly email, with an encouragement at the bottom of the email. Focus on mission and vision: Study and training on books (Teaching Redemptively, Engaging God's World, Give Them Grace, The Young Peacemaker, Shepherding a Child's Heart); Training them how to better teacher: The Effective Teacher, Transforming Your Teaching, Neuro Teach, Teach Like a Champion.
- **Student Achievement:** Look at the data from CTP4 tests, summative and formative assessments
- **Allocation of time and resources:** 20% of your time should be spent on getting training or training others. For teachers: Ensure that they are spending effective time toward instructional goals. What do you need to spend your



- money on? What is the most effective way to spend money? Can a donor or board help with resources?
- **Parent Partnership.** Parents are your customers. Invest in them so that become “raving fans.” Require teachers to make monthly contact with parents and including both proactive and reactive communication. Read the comments (via RenWeb) to and from parents. Attend parent conferences that may be difficult for teachers. Attend soccer and basketball games, etc.
 - **Faculty Team(s):** The Lower School Team
 - **Three Hallways:** Three hallway teams. The hall teams pray together, have meals together. Assigned prayer partners.
 - **Meet with teachers twice a year for 30 minutes:** How can I pray for you? How are you?
 - **Each day:** Talk to 2-3 teachers personally each day

Meeting the Needs of a More Academically Diverse Student Population

- Westminster School now has more average students and students with learning challenges
- How to do meet these needs the best we can?
- Create an **Umbrella of Support in three layers** to meet the needs of a diverse academic population:
 - Train each teacher effectively—with teaching techniques that are best for students with learning challenges, since they are generally the best for any kind of student.
 - **Instructional Support Teachers:** Westminster also added instructional support teachers who focus on math, literature (reading), and language arts (grammar and composition). Sometimes 3-4 students go to the instructional support teacher. Sometimes 3-4 students who need remediation (e.g., a reading comprehension skill). Sometimes “high-flyer” students go for enrichment. These groups meetings have become normalized across the grammar school.
 - **Academic Support:** a daily “pull-out” program for students with diagnosed learning disabilities. Sometimes 1-1 training, sometimes meetings with 3-4 students. Parents pay for this daily support program.

Conclusion

- Being a grammar school leader is a weighty but very rewarding job
- Look to Christ to be your strength when you realize that “you are not enough.”

Recommended Resources

- Note: Lori Jill does not endorse all the content of each of these books; they must be filtered and assessed in light of the classical tradition of education and Christian belief and practice.



- Michael Fullan, *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for School, Districts, and Systems*
- Thomas Sergiovanni, *Strengthening the Heartbeat: Leading and Learning Together in Schools*
- Robert Marzano, *The New Art and Science of Teaching*
- Doug Lemov, *Teach Like a Champion*
- Carol Dweck, *Mindset*
- Heidi Hayes Jacobs, *Bold Moves for Schools: How We Create Remarkable Learning Environments*
- Eric Jensen, *Teaching Students with Poverty in Mind*
- David Sousa, *How the Brain Learns*
- Carol Ann Tomlinson, *How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms*
- Daniel Willingham, *Why Students Don't Like School: A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom*
- Jay McTighe, *Schooling by Design: Mission, Action, and Achievement*
- Grant Wiggins, *Understanding by Design*
- Kimberly Carraway, *Transforming Your Teaching*
- Glenn Whitman and Ian Kelleher, *Neuroteach: Brain Science and the Future of Education*