



Growing Classroom Culture through Parent Partnerships with Robyn Burlew

Lecture 7:
Conversation with Dr.
Christopher Perrin and
Robyn Burlew

Outline:

Why did you choose this room as an illustration for you talk about culture? What does it suggest to you that makes it important and helpful?

- What was the rhetoric of a place?
- What would be on the walls of our school if we were going to represent a flourishing versus and non-flourishing school?
- The artist would have been expecting this art to inform the imaginations of the leaders.

Have you thought about decorating the walls of the school with art?

- Lorenzetti worked as part of a team.
- Citizens are in harmony with the whole.

How does a student participate in a school?

- The activity of a student at a school is not only in a classroom at a desk.
- The communal life of a school, the celebrations, the care for the grounds, the making of music and dancing together, building of things are included in the life of the school.

How do you unpack the word community for a perspective family?

- Community is working together towards a common goal.
- As a real community you have shared goals.

How does a community actually occur? What have you learned as you've tried to build culture at Veritas with school leaders and teachers?

- Most of culture shaping and cultivation is birthed out of conversations.
- Faculty leaders have to be intentional about building culture.
- Bells were not part of something that we should use in our schools.
- We share our resources (such as the Portrait of the Graduate).
- Unless you hash it out, you're not going to be able to live it out (school mission statements, school handbooks).



What other analogies have you thinking about what a school culture can be?

- How do we structure our time with work, prayer, and rest?
- Art has been made for a place.

Could you describe how some of these changes came about?

- Five minutes seemed to be a leisurely transition time.
- We are supposed to be fostering conversations between students and teachers.
- We changed to ten minute transitions.
- What do humans need to thrive and flourish and to learn well?

Could you comment on a few things that you have ordered for students that are a blessing?

- Have a morning meeting to begin the day. Choose a hymn (from a variety of traditions).
- Gather for the doxology together after lunch.
- This takes a lot of effort, but it is worth it toward the community.

Does the Portrait of a Teacher include culture building elements?

- Only one of the bullets speaks to the pedagogical prowess of the teacher.
- The rest of the bullets are about how the teacher relates to the students.

What other words have you considered besides teacher?

- A shepherd is taking the sheep to a good place.
- A shepherd is pursuing the sheep that is lost.
- An interaction with another human being can be uncomfortable even if they are much younger.

How are you helping teachers at Veritas to be cultivators?

- You have a lot of the nature of things to consider.
- Pruning and thinning are involved in cultivation.

When have you seen some fruit that encourages you that you are moving in the right direction?

- I am more interested in you looking back at a life lived well and virtuously. We are interested in them as people. This is a long haul effort.
- You don't garden in isolation, we aren't bubbles.
- We see students rereading books, and staying with the faith. They are being faithful themselves.
- A garden can tolerate some weeds as long as they aren't too close to the plants (such that they steal nutrients).
- We do not use demerits, but use conversation instead.

How has a lack of systems of demerits worked at Veritas?



- It is time consuming and you miss somethings. You choose what it is that you concentrate on.
- It is wise to overlook an offense.
- My school culture is more in danger of unkind words than it is by drugs.

Why is correction as conversation still the right thing to do for the teacher and the teaching?

- Correction expresses that I am for you. We've been given an idea that correction is a negative thing in a relationship.
- More often than not, students who have a conversation with a teacher to correct them end up with a stronger relationship.

How do we assess students in ways that cultivate virtue and are ordered according to human nature and that build up and edify?

- Is the grade forward looking (moving the student towards more learning) or is it backward looking towards the past?
- Are grades about instruction or just about error identification?
- Separate the narrative (the future part) from the past part of grading.
- If we are about virtue, then one of the last things we want students to get the idea of is that they have arrived at perfection. There is room for a customized response for even the top performing students.

What have you done at Veritas to try to create a new way of thinking about what assessment is?

- We stopped doing numerical and letter grades in the lower school. We do narrative feedback.
- Anxiety over grades has increased with electronic gradebooks. At Veritas we turned off access to the electronic gradebook during the week.
- It is a kind of culture clash.

Why is partnership with parents a cliché and how have you tried to change the meaning of partnership at Veritas?

- Talk enough about what the partnership is and isn't so that it can weather the stresses in the journey.
- You've got to agree on the end goal of what this education is for.