Contextualized Professional Development:
Teacher Training Institute

Van Lunen Fellows Applied Project

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Project Summary

At its first strategic planning retreat conducted in June 2010 following a change in both administration and board leadership, Harvester Christian Academy reaffirmed its commitment to Christian education grounded in Reformed philosophy and asserted that the school would "maintain and develop a faculty and curricular program reflecting a Biblical world and life view."[1]

The Teacher Training Institute was designed to focus professional development around those particular distinctives defined by the school to shape the Harvester teacher and thereby provide catalysis for school improvement. TTI has three primary goals:

1. Focused teacher training and development
2. Establish a model for instruction and assessment
3. Provide a link from training to compensation

The project components have been successfully identified and developed. Selected implementation of training components began in January 2012, with the intent of initiating the full program for the 2012-2013 school year. Given a number of competing variables, adjustments to the school's compensation structure have been tabled.

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[1] HCA Strategic Planning Summary June 2010

Project Focus

Most successful corporations operate an active and effective training mechanism for employees that targets performance goals. Steven Covey has said, "If we keep doing what we're doing, we're going to keep getting what we're getting." Often schools continue to institutionalize norms and practice instead of directing training toward specific ends.

The Teacher Training Institute serves as a primary training mechanism for faculty members focusing professional competencies, worldview development, and improvement. It also provides a link from training to compensation, asserting that faculty members who complete the components will be better equipped to teach our students. This program is in addition to regular in-service and training requirements or continuing education opportunities. It is intended to represent the particular convictions and priorities that provide distinction for Harvester Christian Academy.

The Institute also serves as a model for instruction and assessment. Professional competencies include opportunities for both quantitative (i.e. ACSI Certificate) and qualitative (i.e. peer observations) measures. Training modules reflect a variety of instructional modalities and assessment includes small group discussion, written work product, and objective testing. The *Personal Development Plan* affords the faculty member the opportunity to individualize their own improvement initiatives and the entire program reflects corporate values.

As Harvester Christian Academy seeks to maintain fidelity and commitment to Christian education grounded in Reformed philosophy, it is important for faculty members to be well trained in worldview, and to demonstrate development since "… a solidly build Christian [school] will rise from its faith in Jesus Christ and then explore the height and depth, the length and breadth of what it **means** to build on this faith – not just for [the school years] but also for a lifetime of learning and work within the kingdom of God" (Engaging God's World, Plantiga, pg. xiv).

Methods and Procedures

Following the strategic planning retreat, school leadership identified seven key areas for school improvement – one of which was faculty training. HCA was also preparing for a SACS/ACSI accreditation visit which helped clarify school improvement issues. After spending time with individual faculty members, reviewing historical accounts, observing instruction, and conducting focus group meetings, school leadership recognized that developing mission appropriate faculty was critical.

Several faculty teams were established to assist with school improvement efforts including a curriculum team. This team emerged as a good representation of the faculty and provided collaboration and input to the training and development issue. The TTI concept was first presented to the curriculum team and it received a strong endorsement. Then it was discussed with the board and assigned a high priority for development.

The curriculum team led discussions with the entire faculty regarding perceived training needs. Members of the administration researched best practices, consulted with colleagues, and reviewed materials. A concept framework and timeline were presented to the school board in May 2011 and a formal presentation was made in October 2011 and was authorized. Development of an implementation schedule was then considered and reviewed by the curriculum team and the entire program was presented to the faculty in December 2011. Existing faculty were granted the opportunity to include documented professional development activity as part of the program. The first training session was conducted in January 2012.

Results

As the project was developed, three categories emerged as part of the scope of the program – professional competencies, training modules, and application projects. Given the broad range of the experience, the program was divided into two tiers – Level 1 and Level 2 (see Exhibit 1)

The first category, professional competencies, includes those skills necessary for successful teaching. These are defined by the school as part of professional standards and represent a range of items such as but not limited to credentials required by accreditation and state regulations, successful classroom performance, and technology skills. Validation of these competencies includes both qualitative and quantitative measures. The second, training modules are specific training events and activities oriented toward worldview development and all include linked assessment. The third, application projects, provide teachers with a capstone event that demonstrates their aptitude and ability to wield these concepts and skills.

The curriculum team provided valuable input regarding dividing the program into two levels, assigning activities and assessments, and implementation. Consideration was given to how to best illicit faculty "buy in" and maximize improvement. Based upon faculty response, participation in the program is mandatory for all faculty members with successful completion of all Level 1 activities required within two years of initiation. Completion of Level 2 is not mandatory for all faculty members but is required to be eligible for faculty leadership positions (i.e. department chair, lead teacher, committee chair). Upon the successful completion of each level, the teacher would receive a base salary increase. The board has not yet established these parameters.

Exhibit 1

Activity	Assessment
LEVEL 1	
Technology Competencies	Various as defined by Technology Team
Classroom Observations	Formative and Summative Documentation
Personal Development Plan	Written document with periodic review
How the Gospel Alone Helps	Written Response
Effective Teacher – DVD Series	Content Test
Selected Readings	Group Discussion Questions
Season of Life	Reaction paper
LEVEL 2	
ACSI Standard Certificate	Certificate
Worldview Workshop	CEU Participation
Insight into Film	Read articles, watch film, discussion questions
Total Truth	Reaction Paper
Philosophy of Education Statement	One page document

Analysis and Commentary

Derek Keenan's article, *A Dangerous Complacency: Neglecting Professional Development*, highlights the importance of effective professional development as a key component of school quality. I believe his assertion that we often neglect this issue is correct – at least it squares with my experience. As the new head of school at HCA, it was important to understand what the school historically valued (or at least espoused) and how those values were reflected in

practice. I quickly learned that while worldview and Reformed ideas were at the core of the school's foundational documents, little had been done to position the faculty to deliver on those values. Thus, the concept of the Teacher Training Institute emerged.

I found that while both board leadership and faculty were eager to align core values with practice, they had little understanding of the lack of connection between stated mission and practice. Rather, the school had developed a different, albeit still valid reputation than was articulated in its core values.

Members of the curriculum team were instrumental in establishing timelines and providing feedback on activities. It was interesting to note that they were more aggressive than administration in terms of requirements and deadlines. Curriculum team members were eager to engage the process and desired school improvement. The use of different instructional and assessment strategies became an important part of the program as faculty indicated their desire for a model as well.

This project highlighted the importance of aligning core values and practice, demonstrated the powerful impact of collaboration, and has provided a foundation for Harvester Christian Academy to pursue school improvement.