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A Study of the Nature and Extent of Faculty Meetings

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A STUDY OF THE NATURE AND EXTENT
OF FACULTY MEETINGS

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington College of Education

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Albert Franklin Wedekind

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THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING
THE PLAN 2 REQUIREMENT FOR THE
COMPLETION OF A RESEARCH PAPER.

Ned Phillips
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Faculty meetings, now an American tradition, were conceived as a positive force for teacher and school improvement. Yet many meetings are hardly more than occasions for making announcements. Very little of a constructive nature results and the opportunities for educational growth offered by these meetings are lost.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this study was to investigate various methods and procedures employed by schools to organize, facilitate, and evaluate faculty meetings. More narrowly, the objective of the study was to investigate useful methods of implementing faculty meetings to obtain optimum teacher and educational growth.

Importance of the study. The fact that teachers often echo their resentment at spending valuable time at a faculty meeting is evidence of a problem that confronts many administrators. Likewise, the topic has been on the agenda of many national and state conventions

of teachers, principals, and administrators.

Teaching adults to participate in a democratic discussion is one of the hardest things an administrator has to do and something difficult for teachers to learn. Accustomed to directing discussion, asking questions, and evaluating responses, they do not learn to be cooperative and understanding participants. Punctuality, attentiveness, good manners, active participation, and courtesy taught in the classroom are not always practiced by those who teach others.

The teacher, the core of our educational system, must be happy and satisfied in order to carry out his duties. Yet there seems to be a growing resentment on the part of faculty members toward meetings and activities which extend their normal school day. The dissatisfaction is just when teachers have little free time as it is. Likewise, meetings are called on short notice and often falter along with no set time limit. Administrative matters which could be handled by bulletins also cause dissatisfaction. Teachers resent unorganized, inefficiently conducted meetings in which they had no voice in planning.

In a study by Vredevoe (22:110), twenty-one administrators indicated that faculty meetings were the most difficult meetings they had to conduct. Some dreaded and feared faculty meetings and scheduled them as seldom as possible. One writer, a principal, confessed (18:33):

It is so easy to become enamored of the sound of our own voices that we hold helpless bodies of teachers in bondage while we enjoy ourselves talking. Do we not violate the very principle of good teaching that we are trying to put into practice?

Some teachers feel that the faculty meeting is not a teachers' meeting in any sense of the word; it is, instead, a meeting of, by, and for the principal to impose his ideas. They feel that their opinions are sometimes solicited but then forgotten, and the written suggestions they make buried away in dead files and never mentioned again.

Teachers regard faculty meetings as sources of information, motivation, and professional stimulation, or as meetings that must be endured.

II. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since the field was large and many authors have written on the subject, a limitation had to be placed on the type of meeting investigated. Many types of meetings have involved teachers: workshops, institutes, local and regional conferences, social meetings, and general or regular faculty meetings. Because of the vast areas these meetings comprised, the study was concerned with only one type, the general or regular faculty meeting.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF FACULTY MEETINGS

A study of numerous offerings in the field of faculty meetings revealed some central tendencies. One would not expect complete agreement on the subject, especially since no two situations are alike. Generally, there was agreement among authors that practices seem to conform to a simple but effective pattern of meetings and action.

I. THE PURPOSE OF FACULTY MEETINGS

Faculty meetings are scheduled for a great many purposes. Each meeting must have a purpose or reason (which may depend on problems arising during an interim period). The main purpose of any faculty meeting is to improve the program of the school in its entirety. The general faculty meeting has been a leading device in the supervision of instruction.

Faculty meetings have long provided the standard medium for the exchange of professional ideas. These meetings are a valuable device for developing unity in the different areas of learning. The discussion of special methods and problems relative to the several areas of specialization in an average school system may be developed at faculty meetings. Where there are several teachers in

a given field of instruction, much can be accomplished by departmental or grade level meetings (3:718).

An important function of faculty meetings is to guide teachers to continual growth in order that pupils may in turn show maximum growth. Principals, then, must organize these meetings in such a manner that they may be democratic and stimulating (9:287).

Ayer enumerates twelve purposes for scheduling a faculty meeting and indicates that the list should be screened for selection of purposes suitable to the local situation. They are as follows (2:81-83):

1. To reach an agreement as to the philosophy that governs the group's goals.
2. To unify the efforts of the entire educational staff.
3. To improve old practices.
4. To discover problems for special study.
5. To carry on special projects for the improvement of instruction.
6. To plan the integration of newly adopted practices into the standard program.
7. To explore the value of standard supervisory activities and administrative policies.
8. To study community-school relations.
9. To develop morale.
10. To discover and utilize special talent.
11. To exemplify good group action.
12. To inspire teachers' professional enthusiasm.

The twelve purposes listed above, although indicative of the broad scope involved, do not necessarily constitute all of the reasons for scheduling meetings. A more comprehensive listing of seventy special topics for teachers' meetings may be found in Briggs and

Justman's Improving Instruction Through Supervision (2:83).

II. TYPES OF FACULTY MEETINGS

The three chief types of faculty meetings as described by Ayer are: (1) meetings for routine administrative purposes, (2) meetings for social purposes, and (3) meetings for improvement of instruction (2:80). Foster describes only two major types of faculty meetings: (1) meetings for transaction of business and enactment of legislation connected with the management of the school and (2) the supervisory group meeting (10:108). Other authors discuss variations of these types and break them down into smaller units for discussion.

Preliminary faculty meetings. Faculty meetings before the opening of school should be made as profitable as possible. Here is not the time or place for a detailed statement of educational aims and objectives. This meeting should be short; teachers will wish to spend some time in arranging the classroom, in securing their quota of supplies and books, and in organizing their work for the opening of school. The administrative bulletin should have been sent out to teachers in advance so that a minimum of time will be spent on this routine item. No matter how carefully this bulletin has been worked out, some teachers will no doubt ask questions about the opening of school. By placing all the announcements in the bulletin, the principal

can facilitate the teacher's preliminary work and aid him to begin his duties with enthusiasm. The statement by the principal must be brief and general, with a warm welcome to members of the staff (13:55-56).

The professional meeting. The professional meeting constitutes a practical source for in-service growth. This meeting undertakes to renew a teacher's faith in education, reawaken ambition to do superior work, revive pride in the profession, and increase professional and general knowledge. It inspires him to new zeal in his field and creates eagerness for study and creative work. It also increases the confidence and bonds between teachers (11:99).

A humorous treatment of this type of meeting was offered by Blanchard in his book to beginning teachers:

Due to the gravity of the local school situation, the administration has called in an educational consultant from the local nearby college to take over the month's faculty meeting. . . . The college speaker then proceeds in true professional style--what research says, dates, statistics, experimentation, graphs, charts, and finally he sums up the entire project by dumping some twelve theories into the teachers' laps for further discussion and consideration. The result--the faculty is as far from the problem as they were before the meeting started. And the professor has profited too, to the sum of sixty dollars (his honorarium) (4:32).

The choice of topics for the professional meeting may be determined by various considerations. Special interests of the teacher, the needs of the school, the character of previous meetings, the size of the school, and the professional training of teachers are typical

considerations. Reviewing teaching methods learned in college is resented by most teachers. They may profit, however, from a study of some special phase or technique, especially if problems arise from actual classroom situations (10:216).

The departmental meeting. All teachers' meetings are not full staff meetings. In larger schools there is need for departmental meetings. The homogeneity of interests, problems, and special conditions of teaching help arouse teacher interest in these meetings. Here discussions may be held regarding new courses of study, curriculum trends in a particular field, new methods, and departmental problems. This type of meeting tends to develop departmental morale by occasionally permitting the airing of "gripes." The principal may wish to delegate authority to his chairmen or assistants, letting them conduct these meetings. The responsibility, however, is the principal's. He must see that these conferences are worthwhile, that there is ample teacher participation, and that the meetings are enjoyable (10:90-108).

The advantages of the departmental meeting lie in its economy of time, its recognition of individual differences, and its informal proximity to the teachers themselves. It no doubt deserves greater use in the instructional program than it now receives (3:719).

The improvement of instruction meeting. This type of

meeting varies somewhat from the professional meeting in that the primary goal is aimed directly at improving the instructional program. These meetings may include numerous topics; however, the curriculum study meeting is an important example. Other problems appropriate to this meeting are interpretation and use of standardized tests, library usage, spelling, discipline, guidance, visual aids, and scheduling (22:122-13).

The administrative meeting. The last type of meeting is the administrative meeting. At various times it may be advisable to schedule meetings to discuss administrative matters. For example, teachers may want to meet to discuss what can be done about pupils marking on the walls of the building. Teachers may wish to formulate policies for the supervision of dances and activities (12:104). This type of meeting may be utilized to keep teachers informed about policies and regulations supplemental to publications and bulletins (21:253).

III. PLANNING FACULTY MEETINGS

If faculty meetings are to make a genuine contribution to the school program, they must be well planned. Commencing with the first pre-school meeting and continuing through the school year, careful planning and preparation should assure teachers that faculty

meetings can be fun and should at the same time stimulate educational growth. The opportunity to share in planning is essential to the development of strong unity within the staff. Sharing in the choice of the theme for the year's meetings and in the specific plans for each meeting develops interest and provides support for the in-service training program the principal needs.

In his enlightening article, "The Faculty Conference," Millman states (18:34):

The effective faculty conference needs planning. Since the meeting is not an "end-all" in itself, the planning should be in terms of the whole educational program. It must be related to what has gone before and must lead smoothly into what is to follow. A good faculty conference is never an isolated phenomenon. Planning is not a one way street. The principal may make suggestions, but only as one in a group of many. Positional status alone is no reason why his suggestions should get priority. He should accept group decisions by the expressed will of the majority. Principals alone do not make good plans or good teachers. But the teachers and the principals, both working together, are bound to make good plans and better teachers.

If faculty meetings are to promote professional growth in the staff, they must be cooperatively planned by the principal and his staff. Teachers will feel that such meetings are worth-while and stimulating, not just more meetings in an already overcrowded schedule. The attitude of the teachers depends on planning and participation (15:55).

Many authors feel the need of a teachers' committee to help in framing a worth-while professional study program. An advisory

committee may make the needs of teachers known to the principal and aid in organizing the meetings (1:122). Jacobson, Reavis, and Logsdon treat this situation as follows (13:117):

A committee of teachers representative of the faculty may meet with the principal to plan a series of meetings in accord with the supervisory plan for the school. If the supervisory program deals with curriculum enrichment, a series of meetings might well be planned in which are discussed such topics as the ability of the pupils as shown by tests, types of material suitable for dull and bright children, the selection of materials for classroom libraries, and the evaluation of the results of teaching with an enrichment curriculum.

The informative bulletin, Planning for Effective Education, lists six suggestions for planning the faculty meeting (23:10-11):

1. A planning committee working with the principal can be helpful in keeping the agenda close to the needs of a particular school.
2. All individuals affected by a decision should have a share in determining what it will be.
3. The problem selected should be one:
 - a) Which is of importance in the building
 - b) Which, if restricted in scope, is related to the larger, more fundamental problems
 - c) Which the group is competent to attack
 - d) Which the group is authorized to act upon
4. Problems may be identified through many means including the following:
 - a) Informal conversation and discussion
 - b) Evaluation of present status of selected phases of the school program
 - c) Analysis of community expectations of the school
 - d) Study of children, their behavior, their problems, and their growth pattern
 - e) Study of the community and its resources
5. Teachers need time and resources in order to work and plan together:
 - a) Provision should be made for teachers to enrich

their background through reading, correspondence, and visiting. Materials for reference should be available; each building needs a well stocked professional library.

- b) Consultant service from the district, county, State Office or colleges should be called upon when necessary. The consultant should be properly briefed so that he can direct his efforts toward the problems on which the group is working.
6. Machinery for evaluation should be set up at the time that a plan is put into action so that objective evidence concerning effectiveness of the plan will be available.

Rexinger describes a situation where teachers from local schools planned creatively for a pre-school grade level meeting. The planning began in April when committees and chairmen were appointed. Planning and discussions were carried on during the summer months, then when late August arrived the stage was set. Many teachers were involved in this planning. They had offered suggestions generously. Their ideas were treated with respect and became a part of the final plan (19:101).

Many values accrue from a democratically planned program. Teachers are given an opportunity to assume the leadership role, and the status leader learns to become a member of the group. The leadership role is passed from person to person as the subject of interest changes, and each teacher finds something of importance to do. There is better rapport between teachers and between teachers and administrators. Teachers learn to know one another as individuals and to recognize the special talents each has to offer for group

betterment. The faculty meetings are improved because of the sincere effort of each member (7:93).

Some kind of orientation must precede the meeting well in advance, in the form, perhaps, of mimeographed material announcing the agenda and providing a detailed outline of the topic of the day. This will help to eliminate the lengthy discussion of side issues and arguments. If prior to the meeting teachers have had time to discuss the issues, they will feel that the administration has not attempted to dictate their decisions (16:64-65).

IV. TEACHER PARTICIPATION IN FACULTY MEETINGS

There are various degrees of teacher participation at faculty meetings. Some teachers are bored and reluctant to participate while others assume the greater amount of the participatory load. If the individual teacher and the faculty as a whole are to grow professionally, they must participate in the planning and production of their own meetings.

The most efficient, democratic method for achieving staff support is through democratic participation. It becomes necessary for the principal to evaluate from time to time the extent the staff is actually involved in the participatory process. There is no question that authoritarian principles of command achieve results more rapidly; however, this method does not guarantee the unconditional support the

principal must have from his staff (14:36).

Some principals make a practice of staying away from faculty meetings in order to eliminate administrative domination. This seems to be going further than necessary. "The superintendent or principal, though, should cast off the administrative mantle upon entering the meeting and say too little rather than too much" (12:103). The teachers may be given a chance to talk while the administrator listens. Of course there will be times when the principal should speak because of greater experience or because of special knowledge.

The concept of functional leadership by individual teachers is a matter in which the principal should be particularly interested. While the principal needs to serve as discussion leader at early faculty meetings, he should, nevertheless, help the group identify those teachers best suited by talent, experience, and aptitude to furnish leadership in succeeding meetings (21:84).

Smith investigated the problem of making teachers' meetings more effective. She found that the group under study assumed more responsibility for the meetings when the principal limited his own participation and helped guide the group toward being more sensitive to better ways of working. She also discovered that the quality and quantity of teacher responsibility increased as participation in meetings became more widespread. The proposals for action and the assumption of responsibility for interim work also increased (20:142-50).

An example of teacher participation in the public schools of Ely, Minnesota, was reported by Blanding. After viewing a film, The Broader Concept of Method, the staff adjourned to a faculty room for coffee, arrangement into groups, and a discussion of the film. A specific problem regarding the film was given to each group; chairmen and recorders were appointed. The discussion that followed was lively and the comments were many (5:108-12).

At Bloom Township High School, Chicago Heights, Illinois, the first hour of their meetings was usually spent in general discussion with a discussion leader or panel from the school staff. After refreshments the teachers worked as individuals or in departmental groups for another hour. On occasion, all of the time was devoted to individual or departmental planning (17:76-77).

An adverse situation involving the participatory process was humorously treated by Blanchard (4:29):

Participants . . . have the habit of arriving late (primarily because they know in advance that this meeting is just 90 minutes in length, nothing else). The administrator has jotted down several of his "pet" projects, or peeves. He mentions each idea during the meeting, may ask for suggestions from the faculty, and remembers each mentally. The range of topics is so diversified it reminds some teachers of a "Great Books Discussions" meeting. If all the proposals were to be added end to end, the Pentagon wouldn't have room enough to file them. The superficial discussion antagonizes the teacher, puzzles the beginner and presents a grandeur of illusions to the speaker. Summary of the meeting might be as follows-- one has spoken, many are present, and nothing is accomplished.

At the Benjamin Franklin High School in New York City, Decessare described the use of an FCC (Faculty Conference Committee) composed of one assistant principal, a departmental chairman, and four teachers. They rotate membership every year and elect a chairman and secretary. The FCC meetings are held twice monthly to draw up the agenda for the faculty meetings. The following situation describes the operational process of their faculty meetings (8:59-62):

Let the faculty show a desire to consider a particular problem: slow learner, gifted pupil, reading retardation, etc., and it's theirs for a future conference. Some of our new teachers were not sure of the role of our grade advisors. They suggested a conference devoted entirely to the various functions of such personnel. The vocational and educational guidance counselor prepared a questionnaire for circulation among the faculty. Their responses formed the basis for a general faculty conference. At this session, the grade advisors defined their functions and invited the opportunity of being still more effective in school life.

If faculty meetings, then, are to be effective, teachers must learn and share in the values of participation. Staff members must aid in the planning process as well as in the actual participation at the meetings. Active discussion by every member is essential. Yet this discussion is not for the purpose of leveling complaints and criticism at the administration; it is aimed toward healthful, professional growth.

V. THE TIME AND LENGTH OF FACULTY MEETINGS

The time. Literature abounds with pros and cons as to the most ideal time to hold a faculty meeting, and there is much

disagreement on this subject. Many authors consider the end of the school day the poorest time since teachers are tired from the rigors of the day. Women teachers, especially, are anxious to get home and prepare the evening meal for the family. Likewise, teachers involved in activities such as athletics realize a conflict after school. The morning meeting before school has been impossible to schedule in many schools due to the early arrival of students. The noon-time meeting also realizes obvious complications such as shortage of time and duties demanding the teacher's presence elsewhere.

The practice by some schools of dismissing classes an hour early to allow time for meetings during the school day is to be commended. Other schools have evening or dinner meetings which may be enjoyable if held infrequently (13:118). In some systems, parents are used in the classroom to free teachers for faculty meetings and study. Under this procedure, children are available if needed in the study program, parents feel an added responsibility and also recognize classroom difficulties encountered by teachers, and teachers themselves feel more responsibility for active participation in the meetings (21:84).

The length. Most authors agree that the faculty meeting should be no longer than one hour. Some even feel that this is too long. The teachers' attention span may be longer than that of the

students, but it has its limits, especially at the end of a fatiguing day. It is best, therefore, to set a dismissal time and stick to it. Ayer feels that the length should vary according to the purpose of the meeting, and that the meeting should be scheduled on either a Tuesday or Wednesday (2:85).

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The writer noticed certain general tendencies while investigating the area of faculty meetings. The summary and conclusions are based on these.

I. SUMMARY

Faculty meetings have been conceived as a method of improving the educational program of the school. The greatest challenge and reward of any principal is that of leading a faculty that is taking positive action.

Creative leadership involves many types of faculty meetings. Among these are the professional meeting, the preliminary meeting, the departmental meeting, the improvement of instruction meeting, and the administrative meeting. Their effectiveness depends upon the purposes for which they are scheduled, the involvement of proficient planning, the degree of democratic participation, and the consideration of a suitable time and reasonable length.

II. CONCLUSIONS

Faculty meetings should be planned by a committee of

teachers; the principal should realize that the ideas for consideration need not necessarily be his own. Most of the staff should indicate a desire to study a problem before it is selected, and a central theme for all the meetings during a year should be established early in the school year or even prior to the opening of school so that there will be unity in the year's program.

An agenda and summary of issues involved should be released well in advance of the meeting if teachers are to come prepared for a constructive discussion and not for a "gripe" session or a lengthy discussion of trivial matters. If a lengthy discussion becomes evident, a committee should be appointed to further work on it and report at a later meeting. Meetings should be conducted by classroom teachers, department heads, supervisors, and administrators--although administrators should avoid dominating the meetings. Teachers must be encouraged to participate actively under the alert guidance of the discussion leader.

The greatest danger any principal faces is the temptation to regard faculty meetings as a necessary evil, allowing them to deteriorate into sessions devoted solely to matters of school routine or making them simply oral bulletins. Experience teaches the bitter lesson that the most brilliantly conceived set of instructions elaborated in a bulletin may be completely ignored by some staff members. Consequently, a certain amount of routine must be covered in most faculty

meetings. The important consideration is that such material be handled as expeditiously and briefly as possible, that meetings be planned to realize their greatest effectiveness by utilizing the subjects and materials which logically belong there.

No time during the school day seems to meet with complete approval for scheduling the faculty meeting. In spite of objectionable features, the after-school meeting is the most common and has enough redeeming features to warrant its continued use. A coffee break with an opportunity for a bit of social relaxation helps any group of busy teachers to get their second wind before embarking on another job. Excusing school early for the purpose of scheduling meetings is desirable, and this method has proven successful where it has been used.

No one plan is perfect for all school situations, yet the material that has been presented seems sensible and practical. Teachers should feel that every meeting is so important that required attendance is not necessary. With no boring, unimportant meetings, there will be a happier faculty. A happy faculty means better teaching. Better teaching means more learning--the ultimate aim of all sincere administration.

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