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DISSERTATIONS ON CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: TODAY'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS, TOMORROW'S CHALLENGES

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Renewed interest in Catholic schooling is evidenced by both the number and kinds of dissertations on Catholic schools produced between 1991 and 1996. These dissertations help develop an accurate picture of the state of Catholic schooling, along with the issues confronting school personnel.

Interestingly, of the 174 doctoral dissertations produced, 92 (or 53%) were written at Catholic universities. The Institute of Catholic Educational Leadership (ICEL) at the University of San Francisco, which, under the leadership of Sister Mary Peter Traviss, OP, has long been a leader in research on Catholic schools, was the forerunner in productivity. Thirty-one dissertations (about 18% of the overall and almost 34% of those produced at Catholic universities) were carried out at ICEL during this six-year period. Fifty-seven of the 82 dissertations written at non-Catholic universities were authored at state institutions.

Two caveats. First, the dissertation summaries appearing in this study were derived directly from the authors' abstracts of their dissertations, taken from *Dissertation Abstracts International, UMI Database*. Second, the placing of dissertations in specific categories involved more than a little judgment. For example, a dissertation on the challenges of faith leadership involving the lay principalship in urban schools could have been placed under any of the following categories: ALPS, Diversity, Elementary Education, Religion, Faith, Morality, or Values. Ultimately, the classification decision for each dissertation was arbitrary.

TODAY'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

THE LEADING DISSERTATION CATEGORIES

Under the category of Administration, Leadership, Principals, and Supervision, 24 moderately diverse dissertations were conducted. Carr (1995), for example, in her study of principals' motivation, efficacy, and satisfaction, reported that the level of leadership efficacy and satisfaction increased when the religious mission of the school influenced the principals to continue to serve as Catholic school leaders. Helbling (1992) demonstrated that Fordham's Church Leadership Program was highly effective in the administrative formation of Catholic educational leaders. And while several studies considered the effectiveness of particular leadership styles in the schools, Wisecaver (1991) and Purcell (1991), in assessing the relationship between leadership style and the religious atmosphere of the school, found that principals with a participatory leadership style were effectively able to maintain the religious atmosphere of their schools.

Diversity, the category that embraced Ethnic, Inner City, International, Minority, Multicultural, and Racial issues, included 16 quite distinct studies under its rather far-reaching umbrella. For instance, O'Keefe (1991), in probing into the experiences of low-income and minority students in two Catholic high schools in metropolitan New York, explored how a school with a shared religious purpose is likely to serve its students better than a school without this characteristic. Leung (1991) found that students' sociocultural background is an important variable that might affect their cognitions and feelings about school learning and achievement. Nelson (1992) determined that while historical and demographic constraints in individual schools significantly influence the direction of adaptation to changes in population and environment, cooperatively linked schools generally gain an organizational advantage by expanding their resource base without threatening the school's legitimacy by radical changes in the school's mission or Catholic identity.

Fifteen dissertations dealt with unique aspects in the history of Catholic education. Most of these dissertations told the individual stories of Catholic education in particular locales. Discipline in Hawaii's Catholic schools (Alvarez, 1994), the Catholic subculture and the parishes of Rochester (Milliken, 1994), and the cultural and professional changes in the elementary schools of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee (Joerres, 1994) were among the topics examined.

Under the banner of Religion, Faith, Morality, and Values, 13 dissertations were catalogued. The role of the teacher or principal as moral educator or faith leader was the focus of many of the investigations. In a study of the cultivation of the Jesuit ideal of the teacher as moral educator, Donovan (1995) observed that the overwhelming majority of the lay teachers were unfamiliar with Ignatian ideals and pedagogy, and that Jesuit secondary

schools lack a systematic approach toward methods which would increase professional expertise and spiritual awareness of the goals of Jesuit education. Wallace's (1995) study revealed that principals credited their abilities to lead the school's faith development to 1) their own experiences as Catholics, 2) their professional experiences in Catholic schools, 3) the charisms of sponsoring religious orders, and 4) their mentors. Galetto (1995) found that the more formal the religious education and preparation of the teachers, the more informed they are about Church teachings and the greater the likelihood that they would believe these teachings. He further found that efficacy was primarily related to student achievement, teaching enjoyment, and the sense teachers have that they make a difference in the faith life of the student. Kralemann (1993) determined that Catholic school principals need to reclarify the unique identity of the Catholic school and continue to redevelop leadership skills that lead to deepening the religious dimension of the school and of their own personal convictions.

Secondary education also received a considerable amount of attention, with 12 studies investigating a wide range of issues including the relationship between self-esteem and learning styles (Iazetti, 1992), development of an enrollment promotion plan (Neagle, 1991), and creation of a student handbook (Zlatis, 1992). Griffin (1993), in an effectively focused study, concluded that principal instructional leadership is related to school context and that the decentralized organizational structure of Catholic secondary schools appears to be a generally conducive context for this type of leadership.

Eleven students pursued dissertations under the category of Curriculum and Academic Programs. Though several studies had a mathematics or science focus, the projects undertaken in this realm were topically quite diverse. Webb (1993) and Castillon (1996) reported on the positive impact of the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Recognition Program. Among the issues that surfaced in Purpur's (1993) study were that a coordinated vision or purpose of Catholic elementary schools should be shared by all parish leaders and that the role of parents as the primary religious educators of their children should be reaffirmed. And, in an atypical study, Oldenski (1994) demonstrated that the critical discourses of liberation theology and critical pedagogy can benefit schools.

Gender was another prolific field of endeavor for Catholic school dissertations. Again, the research foci of these 11 dissertations were quite disparate. Winslow (1995), for example, reported on the educational aspirations and future expectations of working class girls in an all-female high school. In a totally different inquiry, Bessette (1992) documented how female Catholic secondary school principals understand, perform, and describe the choices, obstacles, self-images, and issues that relate to their pastoral leadership. Poplin-Gosetti (1995) studied an all-male Catholic high school's transition to coeducation, finding that the privileged positions provided by power rela-

tionships and embedded exclusionary practices may prevent the achievement of gender equality.

Eleven dissertations forged fairly distinct research paths in the realm of Identity and Mission. Among recommendations gleaned from Blecksmith's (1996) study were that all principals and teachers receive adequate inservice on Christian education documents and that Catholic schools, in determining their mission and purpose, must continue the work of those who have come before in the academic and faith formation of young Catholics. Colosimo (1993) used concept mapping to examine social capital—the resources available in the social structure of the school that aid the education of children—as it exists in the religious communities surrounding Catholic elementary schools. Greelee (1995) suggested that administrators' effective communication is vital to making the vision and mission statement a reality for teachers and that administrators need to be aware of the effects of experience on the teachers' perceptions of belief statements.

THE CATEGORIES IN THE MIDDLE

A plethora of research topics comprising nine dissertations was placed in the Teachers category. Barrett-Jones (1993) examined the factors that initially motivated teachers to choose a career in Catholic schools and the factors that determined a teacher's decision to leave or remain in a Catholic school setting. Shimabukuro (1994) formulated a typology of the ideal Catholic school teacher through content analysis of Roman and American Church documents pertaining to education. Zimmer's (1994) study revealed that a spiritual calling had a significant relationship to some meaningful, attractive qualities in a teacher's personal attitude toward a teaching career. Tarr (1992) concluded that both length of tenure in Catholic schools and the importance of religion are hallmarks of an organizationally committed Catholic laity.

Until a few decades ago, Catholic schools were staffed overwhelmingly by vowed religious and priests. Their contributions to Catholic education in this country can only be described as immense. Of the eight doctoral dissertations under the category of Religious Orders, many addressed the preservation of a religious order's charism. Among those are Brandao's (1993) study of faculty perceptions regarding the charism in the schools of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, New Orleans Province; Englund's (1995) identification of the characteristics which form the Benedictine charism of education; and Shrafan's (1994) indications that the Salesian methodology and school culture were strongly perceived by the students and educators, who agreed that this methodology pervades the school and creates a particular feel within it.

Questions surrounding finance and Catholic schools have become even more acute today. Eight slightly varied studies were carried out on this topic. Lundy (1995), for instance, suggested that "close coupling," in the form of

financial coordination between church and school, contributes to school survival and strength and that mission-focused school leadership, associated with strong school management, strengthens the school's chances for survival. Plante (1991) suggested a need for training of pastors, principals, and laity in all areas of financial management and for development of expertise in the use of financial development sources.

Traditional Catholic teaching holds that parents are the primary educators of their children. Seven dissertations were placed in the Parents category. Chilampikunnel (1995) found that parental involvement in school-related activities was the most important predictor of children's performance, school attendance, and self-esteem. Smrekar (1994) found that school organizational processes and structures which promote social cohesion, commitment, and communication are powerful means of mediating the influence of social class on family-school relations.

Six dissertations listed under the School Choice category revealed interesting findings. Gallanter (1994) found, among other things, that the most important reason parents selected private schooling was to avoid public schooling which they perceived as offering less than a quality education and that schools sought out families on the basis of matched values, educational mission, and support for the school curriculum. Among Gibson's (1993) findings were that of parents who chose Catholic schools 98% of the mothers were Catholic and 80% of them had attended private schools themselves. Taylor (1996) found that parents appeared to look for a school that would satisfy the special needs of their child and would be compatible with their own values, morals, and personal philosophy.

Four studies focused on Boards and Governance. The identification and comparison of the perceptions and attitudes of priests, school board members, principals, and teachers concerning their roles in matters of Catholic school governance in the Diocese of Boise (Fontaine, 1996), and a comparison of the perceptions of school board members, administrators, and staff with respect to their involvement in the decision-making aspect of policy development (Reiter, 1994) were two areas of research conducted under this category.

Students were the subjects of four dissertations. Among Mendoza's (1991) conclusions were that, based on student, parent, and faculty/staff perceptions, student academic aspirations and achievement are developed in the Catholic secondary school because of challenging academic programs and high expectations of success, and the foundation of the Catholic Church enables students, parents, and faculty/staff to be companions in education.

The field of Elementary Education was addressed in four of the dissertations. McCormack (1995) determined how well the Catholic elementary school functions as an agent of formative parenting, and Cornell (1991) asked, To what extent is work culture a significant determinant of school aca-

demic productivity in Catholic elementary schools?

Three studies addressed issues under the Reform and Restructuring category. Donohue's (1992) data, for example, suggested that professional educators perceived restructuring as a process to be engaged in rather than an outcome to be achieved.

BRINGING UP THE REAR

Several categories contained two or fewer dissertations. Of the two dissertations in the Planning category, one study dealt with the modification of authority structures for some Catholic schools in the Diocese of Buffalo (Crawford, 1991) and one attempted to measure the effect of the demand factors on enrollment in Catholic secondary schools in the Albany diocese (Pulver, 1993).

The following categories enlisted one dissertation each: Bishops, Pastors, Priests; Community; Justice; Law; and Technology. The study on Bishops, Pastors, and Priests investigated the leadership behavior of the pastors in the parochial elementary schools of the Los Angeles archdiocese (Osuji, 1995). The recent emphasis on lay principals as faith leaders, for instance, opens up a host of potential questions as to the role of the pastor in that situation. The sole dissertation on Community (Orlowski, 1991) addressed two questions: What activities, personal traits, and relationships promote a sense of group cohesion in a Catholic high school? And how do the members of this school perceive and account for such cohesion? The one study on Law comprised an analysis of the impact of Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan on American non-public education in the 20th century (Cepelka, 1992). And, in the category of Justice, Eruaga (1991) explored whether the ideals of social justice mandated for Catholic schools by Catholic hierarchies were operational in the policies and practices of Catholic schools.

As a final note, it was surprising, given technology's expanding use in instructional methodology and curricular affairs, to discover only one dissertation conducted on technology. Heltsley's (1996) content analysis revealed that the software programs in use in Catholic elementary schools communicate a variety of appropriate and inappropriate values to the students. Her study recommended that the ideological orientation of software used in classrooms undergo consistent and rigorous examination to effect the transmission and safeguarding of particular values.

TOMORROW'S CHALLENGES

Given the ultimate responsibility that the diocesan bishop has for educational and catechetical efforts, it is lamentable that recent dissertations have not offered any studies concerning the bishops' impact on Catholic education.

Much can be learned from a study that produces a tight focus on educational efforts in a particular diocese. Future leaders and administrators would be well served by learning about what has worked successfully and what has failed in the operation of diocesan school systems.

Two regional possibilities are present in the Midwest. The late William E. McManus, former bishop of Fort Wayne, was a strident, outspoken supporter of Catholic schools. McManus seemed to take every opportunity available to speak favorably of Catholic schools. He was a regular contributor to the national dialogue about Catholic education and moved comfortably both in the world of bishops and in that of school administrators. A study of McManus's solicitude for Catholic education, both diocesan and national, would make a valuable contribution to the knowledge base in Catholic school administration.

Another example comes from Ohio, home to historically strong Catholic schools. James W. Malone, retired bishop of Youngstown, former diocesan superintendent of schools, participant at Vatican II, and former president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), has been a positive force in Catholic education for the past several decades. Malone's diverse experience in various administrative roles makes him an ideal candidate for a study that would seek to uncover one leader's philosophy in charting a future for Catholic schools. Malone participated in the deliberations at Vatican II and was highly involved in the formulation of the document *Gravissimum Educationis*, the Vatican II Decree on Education. The mechanics of the writing and revising of this document is itself a matter worthy of a historiographer's attention. Malone's overall contribution to Catholic education, as well as his more localized efforts in Ohio, represent fertile areas for future historical research.

In addition to the impact of specific leaders on the success of Catholic education, some studies have tended to focus on the attitudes of a group of clerical leaders toward Catholic schools. J. Stephen O'Brien proffered the initial study of this type in 1987 when he wrote *Mixed Messages: What Bishops & Priests Say About Catholic Schools*. A similar type of study assessing the attitudes of pastors toward Catholic schools was recently completed by John Convey (*Mixed Messages Revisited: Views of Bishops and Priests Concerning Catholic Schools*) for the conference "American Legacy at a Crossroads: Research Synthesis and Policy Analysis for Catholic Schools," at the Catholic University of America. Convey found significant changes in clerical attitudes since O'Brien's study, highlighting the need for ongoing assessment and evaluation of priests' attitudes toward Catholic schools.

In the area of social justice, it is difficult to understand why only one dissertation attempted to analyze the place of the Catholic school in promoting the social justice teachings of the Church. Official Church documents under-

stand the Catholic school to be an important component of the Church's overall educational mission. Included in this mission are the promotion of justice, the struggle for peace, and a global concern for all God's people. While some educators maintain that the Gospel has social implications, others forcefully resist the temptation to characterize it as addressing social issues in anything but an explicit fashion.

David J. O'Brien's recent unpublished report on Catholic social teaching and Catholic higher education is instructive here. O'Brien found that U.S. Catholic colleges and universities have made only a little progress in incorporating Catholic social teaching into their structured curriculum. Even in the presence of "remarkable outreach programs," O'Brien tags Catholic social teaching as a "well-kept secret" on most campuses. O'Brien concluded that "there is apparently little systematic attention given to incorporating Gospel values and Catholic social teaching into general education or into departmental majors, even for those students who have indicated a clear commitment to lay leadership." One wonders if the same is true for Catholic high schools.

In the area of technology, Catholic education has been blessed with a forward-looking approach. An example of a national effort to promote systematic incorporation of technology into Catholic schools is the New Frontiers program. Because of the initiative of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) and many other educational institutions, many dioceses and schools have technology plans containing articulated visions of the future. But the time has come to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of these efforts.

Some salient questions in this regard are: How does technology help us in promoting values and building community? What are the best technological implementations in religious education? Are there technological advances that might be appropriate in our liturgical life? Does technology contribute to social capital? There is no argument that technology is a valuable, indispensable part of the future of Catholic schools; we need, however, serious study and evaluation of efforts that are under way.

In terms of national impact, most experienced Catholic educators know well the leadership and service provided by national organizations such as the NCEA. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) has also provided national leadership for Catholic schools with timely documents, pastoral letters, and its own Department of Education in Washington, DC. The United States Catholic Conference (USCC) has a long history of working to promote policies at the national level that are supportive of the overall mission of the Church.

Studies of these national efforts and organizations would help Catholic educators to understand and appreciate their ministry in a more global context. For example, what has been the impact on Catholic schools of the 1972

NCCB document *To Teach as Jesus Did?* NCEA has sponsored the highly successful program “Shepherding the Shepherds.” What has been its impact on Catholic educational leadership? Research that focused on the work of our national organizations or simply on a small part of their work might help us to see our recent past in a new light.

Law is the final area worthy of much more attention than it has received in recent dissertations. Civil issues aside, the Code of Canon Law is rich in laws establishing the necessity of Catholic education. By delineating the rights and responsibilities of both clergy and laity, the Code of Canon Law places Catholic education squarely at the heart of the Church. In fact, given the clear importance of Catholic education in canon law, it is surprising that those seeking access to Catholic education have not sought to redress their grievances through ecclesiastical processes. The last dissertation of note in the U.S. addressing the place of Catholic education in canon law was completed in 1939 by Conrad Boffa (*Canonical Provisions for Catholic Schools*) at the Catholic University of America. More research in this area is needed in order to explicate fully and protect adequately the place of Catholic schools within the overall judicial structure of the Church.

The current national political climate makes it all but certain that ongoing developments such as vouchers, school choice, and the charter school movement will involve Catholic educators in ample civil and constitutional cases. Timely research is required here as well to help keep diocesan and school leaders properly informed and disposed to meet the demands of the Gospel.

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