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NEW PARADIGMS AND UNCHANGING PURPOSES OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: A RESPONSE TO SR. ANGELA ANN ZUKOWSKI

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Sr. Antczak responds to Sr. Angela Ann Zukowski's article, "New Learning Paradigms for Catholic Education," which appeared in the first issue of the Journal. The author questions Sr. Zukowski's call for a new paradigm shift in Catholic education, raises questions about the impact of such a shift on the purposes of Catholic schooling, and considers the potential of the New Frontiers criteria for assessing the application of new technologies.

In her article "New Learning Paradigms for Catholic Education," Sr. Angela Ann Zukowski (1997) calls Catholic educators to pursue a "new learning paradigm" in Catholic education. Much about technology that Sr. Zukowski relates and the ideas of the many authorities whom she cites may be found in professional education journals. However, what is unique about the piece is Sister's assessment of the willingness and readiness of the Catholic school community to embrace new technologies. Sr. Zukowski calls for a paradigm shift in Catholic education in order to implement new technologies and offers a new statement of purpose for Catholic schools. To the end of assisting Catholic schools toward integrating new technologies, she describes the New Frontiers for Catholic Schools (NFCS) project, which she directs at the University of Dayton in conjunction with Regina Haney of the National Catholic Educational Association, and provides several "NFCS praxis stories" to illustrate how various Catholic schools have designed an integrated interdisciplinary Infomedia Plan. In conclusion, Sr. Zukowski challenges Catholic educators to find a distinct verse to contribute to the technology revolution.

In response to Sister's article, I question: (1) the inference that Catholic schools will be in deep trouble in 2015 because of their resistance to change through technologies, (2) the use of the phrase "paradigm shift" to describe needed changes in Catholic schools, (3) the purpose of Catholic education which she associates with the new paradigm she describes, and (4) the absence of evidence with respect to the seven criteria identified to assess the application of new technologies in the New Frontiers schools. Finally, I wish to suggest what appears to be the distinct "verse" that Sr. Zukowski offers to Catholic education.

THE STATUS OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN 2015

Sr. Zukowski does not seem hopeful about the state of Catholic schools in 2015 *vis a vis* technology and concludes, "if the current situation of most of our Catholic schools is any prediction of the future, a significant number of our schools will be in deep trouble" (1997, p. 52). Research does not seem to support this position. In fact, good things are happening in the Catholic school classrooms of the United States. Reporting on the 1996-1997 school year, National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) statistics showed that "for the fifth consecutive year, enrollment in Catholic schools nationwide has increased....since 1992-1993 it has increased by 79,000 students" (NCEA, 1997, p. vii). In addition, the effectiveness of Catholic schools has been affirmed in the investigations of Coleman and Hoffer (1987) and Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993), and a promising future lies ahead (Convey, 1992).

In essence, there should be no alarm about the state of Catholic schools. To be sure, in the 1960s and 1970s there were bleak indicators about the schools' future. But the Catholic schools of this country honestly and creatively responded to questions about their viability. In 1972 when the U.S. bishops wrote *To Teach as Jesus Did* (National Conference of Catholic Bishops), they said in part: "We are well aware of the problems which now face the Catholic school system in the United States. Specific steps can and should be taken now by concerned parents, educators, pastors, and others to ensure the continuance and improvement of Catholic schools" (p. 33). Since the 1970s Catholic schools have worked hard to assure not only their continuance but the quality of their academic performance.

Catholic school educators and parents have shown that they desire the continuance of their schools and that they care about the schools' growth and improvement. Yet in the area of technology, Sr. Zukowski reports inadequate growth. She states that although many Catholic schools have at least one computer lab, that does not mean that "methods of instruction or the infrastructure of our Catholic school environments has been modernized to meet the 21st century paradigm" (1997, p. 52). She points to a major weakness in curriculum. Further she adds that "if the administration inspires imagination,

courage, and commitment, Catholic educators can transcend their doubts and fears to achieve extraordinary levels of personal and professional fulfillment with the new infomedia technologies within their learning environment" (1997, p. 52). To confront this situation, Sr. Zukowski suggests, "a new paradigm shift in Catholic education" (1997, p. 53).

In those cases where schools have limited technology, Sr. Zukowski suggests that the reason is resistance, doubt, and fear of technology. I propose that inadequate funding is the major reason many schools do not have more advanced technology or more extensive and effective technology education for teachers. In this regard, Catholic schools and teachers share the problem with many others in the country. In fact, the federal government addressed this major obstacle to national educational goals for technology through passage of the Congressional Telecommunications Act of 1996. This act stipulates that the Federal Communications Commission implement a universal service program that makes modern telecommunications services affordable for every K-12 school. Catholic schools as well as public schools will benefit from this assistance. In addition to federal assistance, more Catholic schools can expect to benefit from leadership in technology provided through NCEA, diocesan school departments, and university programs. There is no question that the presence of technology and the pace and extent of change are slower in some places than others; however funding, and not teacher resistance, is the most significant obstacle to the desired change.

PARADIGM SHIFT

When Sr. Zukowski calls for a "new paradigm shift in Catholic education" and makes frequent reference to such a shift, is she confusing the part for the whole? If Thomas Khun's (1970) meaning of "paradigm shift" is to be used as the point of reference, the question needs to be raised as to whether Sister is applying the term correctly. Is the curriculum change in a school a paradigm shift or is the paradigm shift the universal change created by all that is represented by the new technology? As Sr. Zukowski notes, "With or without Catholic educators, this new culture is emerging" (1997, p. 55). To this point Brennan writes, "Technology is not a Catholic phenomenon. It is a phenomenon of the world in which we live. To deny technology is to deny reality" (Brennan, 1997, p. 2). Invoking the term paradigm shift has become a popular way to define great change, but for most Catholic school educators it is sufficient to describe the effects of technology on schools simply as "change." I feel much more comfortable with Stuckey's invitation to develop technology plans for Catholic schools. She writes:

There is no question but that the use of technology in the classroom will enhance knowledge and improve teaching and learning. Technology is a

very powerful tool that has already changed the way the world communicates for both business and entertainment. Technology has the potential to change dramatically the way teachers teach and students learn. (Stuckey, 1997, p. ix)

THE PURPOSE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLING

As she defines and speaks about it, Sr. Zukowski views the new paradigm for Catholic schools as changing the purpose of the Catholic school. Again, it seems that she substitutes the part for the whole. "We advocate a new paradigm," she writes,

which understands that the purpose of Catholic education is not to transfer knowledge but to create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves, to make students members of communities of learners that make discoveries and solve problems. The Catholic school aims, in fact, to create a series of ever more powerful learning environments. (Zukowski, 1997, p. 53)

What Sr. Zukowski describes is her vision of how she sees technology changing the way teachers teach and students learn. It is unfortunate that she appears to advocate a whole new purpose of Catholic schools.

The document *To Teach as Jesus Did* (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972) offers these directions for Christian education and the Catholic school: "Christian education is intended to make men's faith become living, conscious, and active, through the light of instruction.... The Catholic school is the unique setting in which this ideal can be realized in the lives of Catholic children and young people" (1972, p. 28); and "Only in such a school can they experience learning and living fully integrated in the light of faith" (1972, p. 29). The same document moves beyond the overriding purposes of the Catholic school to observe relative to the curriculum:

The program of studies in a Catholic school reflects the importance which the school and sponsoring community attach to Christian formation. Basic to this task, as we have said earlier, is instruction which is authentic in doctrine and contemporary in presentation. Failure on either side renders the instruction ineffective and can in fact impede the growth of living faith in the child. (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972, p. 30)

Clearly, a new way of instruction is made possible by technology and, as the document states, Catholic school educators need to be attentive to methods that are "contemporary in presentation." In fact, 25 years ago this pastoral letter demonstrated a very forward vision of education and specifically addressed technology. The bishops wrote:

Underlying virtually all of the changes occurring in the world today, both as instrument and cause, are technology and the technological world view. Technology is one of the most marvelous expressions of the human spirit in history; but it is not an unmixed blessing. It can enrich life immeasurably or make a tragedy of life. The choice is man's, and education has a powerful role in shaping that choice. (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972, p. 10)

In the midst of change in our Catholic schools, it is important to remain clear about the unique purposes of the school and to keep in focus that the curriculum of the school, however advanced and progressive, remains a means to achieve those purposes.

The impact of technology on the Catholic school and the need to integrate it with the distinct purpose of the Catholic school were specifically addressed by the Congregation for Catholic Education in *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988). The Vatican Congregation wrote: "Because of rapid technological progress, a school today must have access to equipment that, at times, is complex and expensive. This is not a luxury; it is simply what a school needs to carry out its role as an educational institution" (p. 14). However, Catholic school educators are reminded of the need to show students how to relate technology to the religious dimension of life. The document reflected the current Catholic school very well, and stated:

In a number of countries, renewal in school programming has given increased attention to science and technology. Those teaching these subjects must not ignore the religious dimension. They should help their students to understand that positive science, and the technology allied to it, is a part of the universe created by God. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, p. 26)

Even when the curriculum of the Catholic school—its content and methods of learning and instruction—experiences the great changes effected by technology, the distinct and overriding religious purpose of the school to teach the Gospel message must remain very clear.

NFCS CRITERIA

In her assessment of Catholic educators' response to new technologies, Sr. Zukowski reports that

Each day we hear concerns from Catholic educators about their fear that the overemphasis and/or application of new educational technologies will fundamentally destroy the human person, or if not, at least some degree of the quality of human interaction in the classroom. (1997, p. 55)

As a response to this fear, Sr. Zukowski describes the New Frontiers for Catholic Schools project and enumerates criteria the project uses for the application of new technologies to the school learning environment. The criteria include: "conversation, collaboration, conversion, community, creativity, and contemplation" (Zukowski, 1997, p. 55). These criteria and the questions based upon them form a tool for assessing technology. The article then describes NFCS praxis stories. In general, the stories describe the new technology that various schools have acquired and different types of learning experiences that have resulted. What is missing in the examples of the schools cited is commentary on how the educators in those schools apply the NFCS criteria. The list of technology accomplishments cited by Sr. Zukowski could be given for schools that are not part of the NFCS project. Presumably, what is unique in these schools is their use of the seven criteria. Are the criteria valid and helpful? How do they assist faculty and staff in assessing the use of technology in a Catholic school? Answers to these questions would constitute a new contribution to the discussion of technology in the Catholic school.

Unfortunately, within the article there is little elaboration on the seven criteria. They certainly embody values which are particularly important for the Catholic school: they serve to link the basic values of Catholic education and the process of assessing technology. A value strongly held by Catholic schools, for example, is community. The criteria used by the New Frontiers project call for "conversations, collaboration, and community" in assessing technology. Another value for Catholic schools is the "message of Jesus." In its commentary on this value, *To Teach as Jesus Did* maintained that the Church and schools should use contemporary methods and language to proclaim the message of Christ to men and women today. This latter call corresponds to the NFCS criterion of creativity. In essence, the NFCS criteria constitute a solid link for assessing technology and connecting it to the purposes of the Catholic school. Further elaboration on the specifics of each criterion would be helpful.

THE DISTINCT VERSE

It is probably safe to say that most school-site technology discussions jump immediately into practical rather than philosophical considerations about technology. Therefore, it is not surprising that Sr. Zukowski's report of NFCS praxis focuses primarily on hardware and software acquisitions of NFCS schools. However, it will be interesting to learn how NFCS participants use the NFCS criteria as they assess technology needs. These criteria, in my judgment, have potential to be the "verse" that Sr. Zukowski contributes to creating new learning environments for Catholic schools in the 21st century.

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