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## Ideas and Insights From Other Scholarly Works

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## REVIEW OF RESEARCH

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### IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FROM OTHER SCHOLARLY WORKS

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In an effort to engage in dialogue with a broad range of scholarship, we offer several brief overviews of current articles that have appeared in other journals. While such research is not explicitly focused on Catholic education, we are confident that the connections to the ministry of Catholic education are readily accessible.

#### KEEPING COMPANY WITH JESUS AND THE SAINTS

ELISABETH KOENIG (1999). *Theology Today*, 56(1), 18-28.

Elisabeth Koenig, professor of ascetical theology at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, provides a theological foundation for community life. Her focus is the spiritual health of Christian communities, and what she has to say is applicable to parishes, schools, colleges, and families. Using the New Testament Scriptures, the life of Jesus, and the writings of several Christian mystics, Koenig articulates a theology to guide genuine community living. Julian of Norwich and Gertrude of Helfta are used as examples to build on the teachings of Jesus. Koenig embraces and repeats the conviction of the mystic tradition regarding human suffering: the proverbial dark night of the soul, being brought low in one's daily life, illness and pain, even sickness and death, all ultimately serve God's purpose and bring us into a deeper intimacy and stronger communion with the divine.

Both Jesus and the mystics help us to see that dying and rising are at the heart of the Christian life. Spiritually healthy communities value this central Christian conviction and honor the Paschal mystery as the unfolding of God's

plan. This is not to suggest some perversity in God who wills us suffering and pain; rather, it brings into sharper focus this undeniable fact of human existence: People suffer, but through the eyes of faith, all suffering can be ennobling and redemptive.

Following Merton's idea of the false self, Koenig hypothesizes that the growth of the spirituality industry today helps to contribute to a false sense of community which she labels a "shared emptiness." Taking up one's cross and following Jesus, she claims, means freeing one's hands first by setting aside the "cardboard self" (p. 18) most of us carry around. Faculties involved in any kind of community-building process would benefit from Koenig's analysis and caveat.

## **THE FIFTH PHI DELTA KAPPA POLL OF TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

CAROL A. LANGDON (1999). *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(8), 611-618.

**E**ver since the Gallup Organization began working with Phi Delta Kappa to survey teachers' attitudes about public schools, one result has remained constant. Teachers have consistently held a different and generally more positive view of public education than the overall population. In this report on the most recent survey, Carol Langdon, research editor for the Center for Evaluation, Development, and Research at Phi Delta Kappa International, compares and contrasts the enduring differences between how teachers see public schools and what the general public sees.

Teachers consistently grade schools better than the general public does. Whether asked about their own classroom, their own school, other local schools, or schools across the country, teachers have a more positive understanding and appreciation of school life in the United States than does the public. In the most recent survey, teachers gave all public schools their highest rating ever.

There has also been ongoing disagreement concerning the problems facing schools. As far back as 1984, teachers named the main struggle to be the lack of parents' support and interest. The public selected the lack of discipline as the biggest problem in schools. Teachers repeated the same concern in both 1989 and 1996, citing the lack of parental support as the biggest problem schools were facing. The public cited drug use. In this year's survey, teachers and the public were provided with a list of potential problems and were asked to select which was the biggest problem facing local schools. The greatest percentage of teachers selected the consumption of alcohol; the most common response among the public was drug use.

Langdon's summary is filled with similar comparative insights and offers a wealth of information. While no explanation is proffered for the divergence of opinion between teachers and the public, the data are replete with examples that provide a context within which to understand the challenges facing educators in communicating with parents and the local community. To be sure, there are some issues on which teachers and the public appear to agree. A clear majority of teachers (60%) concur with the public (67%) that prayer should be allowed in public schools.

Other questions of interest in the study involve issues such as vouchers and using public funds to attend a private school, merit pay, paying teachers higher salaries in certain subject areas, teacher retention, and the placement of students with learning disabilities. Further research is clearly called for in these and many other areas.

## **THE ORIGINS OF STAR TEACHERS: IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION**

PATRICIA M. HART AND JAMES B. ROWLEY (1999). *Journal for a Just and Caring Education*, 5(2), 203-208.

The work of Martin Haberman comes under discussion in this article by two associate professors in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Dayton. Patricia Hart and James Rowley, authors of the popular video training series *Becoming a Star Urban Teacher* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1994), analyze the functions of star teachers with a view to finding ways to teach the behaviors of exemplary teachers to others.

While Haberman himself acknowledges that one cannot easily specify and delineate a replicable set of star teacher behaviors and instill them in novice teachers, Hart and Rowley endeavor to shape the content of teacher preparation programs by bringing them into contact with the specialized and highly contextualized body of knowledge found in Haberman's work. While this article does not provide a summary of Haberman's research, those with supervisory responsibility for faculty development will be motivated to pursue in-depth review and application of Haberman's findings. In 1995, Haberman published *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty* (Indianapolis, IN: Kappa Delta Pi), wherein he presented a detailed portrait of what star teachers believe and do, contrasting this with what star teachers do not believe and do not do. He also compared and contrasted the convictions and behaviors of quitter and failure teachers.

Novice teachers and all educators interested in the ongoing improvement of teacher performance can benefit from analysis of and reflection on the behaviors and beliefs of star teachers.

## THE PROBLEM OF UNDERQUALIFIED TEACHERS IN AMERICAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

RICHARD INGERSOLL (1999). *Educational Researcher*, 28(2), 26-37.

This article summarizes the results of a research project on the widespread phenomenon of what the author labels out-of-field teaching in American high schools, that is, teachers teaching subjects for which they have little training and education. The author, assistant professor of sociology at the University of Georgia, presents compelling evidence of this growing problem in American high schools.

Ingersoll acknowledges that out-of-field teaching is a politically explosive topic that can have adverse effects on school accreditation and reform. He proceeds cautiously, analyzing previous studies, constructing a precise meaning of the term out-of-field teaching, and calculating the amount of out-of-field teaching. The results, though not surprising to anyone who has experience in school administration, are nonetheless troublesome.

To avoid an academic debate, Ingersoll adopts an absolute minimum standard to call a teacher qualified in any given subject. The standard: holding a college minor in the field one teaches. Even given this lax standard, the data reveal that a third of all secondary teachers of mathematics have neither a major nor a minor in mathematics. Ingersoll remarks:

I assumed that few parents would expect their teenagers to be taught, for example, 11th grade trigonometry by a teacher who did not have a minor in math, no matter how bright the teacher. I found that, however, to be precisely the case for millions of students. (p. 27)

This research also affirms the already widely held belief that the most challenging students in the U.S., namely those from socioeconomically underprivileged backgrounds, are taught by the least qualified teachers. Stated more clearly, school poverty levels are related to the amount of out-of-field teaching in any given school. Teachers in high-poverty areas are more likely to be teaching out-of-field than teachers in more affluent communities. In the area of social studies, for example, Ingersoll demonstrates that nearly 25% of teachers in poor neighborhoods are not qualified, versus 16% in affluent neighborhoods.

School size is another factor that is related to out-of-field teaching. Small schools, defined as having fewer than 300 students, have higher rates of out-of-field teaching in core academic areas than do larger schools, defined as having 600 or more students. Interestingly enough, school sector is also a factor in measuring out-of-field teaching. Large private schools, the data reveal, have among the lowest levels of out-of-field teaching. However, small private schools have the highest levels of out-of-field teaching.

Ingersoll hypothesizes about the root cause of out-of-field teaching and concludes that a variety of occupational and organizational conditions are adversely affecting teaching. Out-of-field teaching is seen to be a common practice and not an emergency condition. Administrators will be particularly interested in Ingersoll's analysis and his closing suggestions regarding what school officials could do to reduce or prevent out-of-field teaching.

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