

BOOK REVIEWS

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA

THOMAS C. HUNT, ELLIS A. JOSEPH, & RONALD J. NUZZI, EDS.
GREENWOOD PRESS, 2004
\$183.95, 802 pages

Reviewed by Katie Bennett

Catholic Schools in the United States: An Encyclopedia (Hunt, Joseph, & Nuzzi, 2004) is a valuable resource for those whose professional work is situated within the field of K-12 education, as well as anyone who is interested in or concerned about the current state of Catholic schools and their future sustainability. Topics addressed in the encyclopedia are pertinent to the daily operation of Catholic schools, as well as to educational research generally and the education-related non-profit sector. The wealth of information provided covers historical and contemporary issues, in both accessible and practical ways.

The two-volume set begins with a brief forward by Glenn Anne McPhee, O.P., (former Secretary of Education for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), followed by an eight-page historical overview of Catholic schools in the United States. These sections set the stage for the encyclopedia by detailing the trials and triumphs of Catholic schools throughout their highly successful history. The editors, however, readily acknowledge the foreboding set of challenges that currently plague Catholic schools. Risking oversimplification, these challenges are due primarily to financial woes caused by the critical transition in staffing from predominantly vowed religious to lay persons that occurred during the second half of the 20th century. In tracing the major contextual influences on the development of Catholic schools over nearly 400 years, these opening comments direct us toward an overarching theme of continuity through change that can be said to have characterized the American Catholic school system from its inception to the present day. In reflecting on the contribution of the encyclopedia, McPhee notes:

Much of the thought, research, and spiritual/moral foundation for this continuity is set out here in these two volumes, available as example, inspiration, and caution for those who may follow in the long tradition of Catholic education or who want to learn more about its rich and varied history. (p. xxiii)

Readers are also reminded of the enduring positive impact of Catholic education on “American pedagogical thought and application” (p. xxiii), as well as its significant contribution to the “Church and civic life in the United States” (p. xxiv).

The 340 entries and handful of photographs found in the encyclopedia span a variety of topics, including some for which a direct connection to Catholic schools is not necessarily obvious at first glance. These topics incorporate key ideas, pedagogical strategies, programs, places, people, events, organizations, and publications—all of which have shaped or been shaped by Catholic schools. Noteworthy figures in the historical development of Catholic schools and the American Catholic Church include Jacques Maritain, George Johnson, and John Tracy Ellis, while other entries highlight the life work of individuals dedicated to education broadly construed and public schooling specifically (e.g., Horace Mann). Seminal publications in the areas of sociology, psychology, and educational theory focus on the works of James Coleman, Reginald Neuwien, John Convey, Andrew Greeley, Howard Gardner, and Mary Perkins Ryan to name only a few, as well as the organized efforts of the National Catholic Educational Association, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. One also finds an abundance of commentary on important magisterial teaching, including the writings of several influential American bishops. Hotly-contested and in some cases volatile issues are also addressed. Among these are Bible reading in schools, vouchers and/or state-aid to Catholic schools, and the sexual abuse scandal. While many of the topics included pertain to education generally, rather than to Catholic schools particularly or exclusively, all entries are written in ways that more or less provide thought-provoking connection to Catholic education. Finally, the encyclopedia contains a wealth of information for practical application at classroom, school, and diocesan levels—entries on mentoring, pre-service teacher preparation, staff development, media literacy, technology integration, multiple intelligence theory, cognitive moral development, bilingual education, and curriculum development, among many others. Combined, the sheer variety of topics provides fascinating insights into the world of Catholic schools via multiple perspectives: historical, philosophical, ecclesiastical, social, academic, and legal.

The encyclopedia is to be commended for its user-friendly format and ease with which readers are able to locate information. An alphabetical list-

ing is available at the beginning of each volume, as is a topical listing of entries grouped according to the following themes: administration, anti-Catholicism, Church documents, curriculum, education associations and organizations, education issues and practices, education leaders, education programs, ethnic groups and concerns, finance, governance, government aid, identity/mission, institutions/school types, learning styles and theories, legal matters, moral education, parents, people, publications and research, religion, religious men and women, students, teachers, technology, and the Vatican: persons and agencies. Suggestions for further reading are provided at various points throughout the two volumes. Connections to other related entries/topics are added at the end of each entry, allowing the reader to navigate the encyclopedia in whatever way proves most beneficial. Finally, a comprehensive index is included at the back of the second volume, along with a biographical guide to contributors which enables readers to further investigate the life and work experiences of authors as an aid to assessing expertise and consequent credibility of specific contributions.

While having a variety of contributing authors allows for breadth and depth in topics discussed, this also introduces variability in style and quality of writing. Certain entries are, by nature, philosophical and abstract, while others proffer straightforward and practical application. As well, some entries are more clearly and expertly written than others. Perhaps this is to be expected in any collaborative compilation of this sort. In terms of content, a handful of the more philosophically-oriented entries ought to provide additional contextual information so that readers might have an easier time situating an abstract theory or ideology within the time and space of Catholic school evolution. This would enhance the encyclopedia's accessibility to non-Catholic readers who may be unfamiliar with foundational Catholic vocabulary and experience, as well as for non-educators unfamiliar with education-related terminology and ideology. For example, the main ideas found in entries that repeatedly reference "Thomism" and "pedagogy," without explicit definition of these foundational terms, may be lost on the uninitiated reader. On rare occasion, information provided in one entry appears to contradict statements made in another related entry. In such a case, it is incumbent upon the reader to rely upon his/her own critical evaluation. While much diversity and acumen is evident overall in the brief biographies of the authors, certain thematic sections seem to be monopolized by one or two individuals, rather than spreading the intellectual effort among practitioners and scholars of more varied background and expertise.

The encyclopedia is a significant contribution to both Catholic education and education generally. It provides critical information regarding the historical foundations of Catholic schools, as well as the means by which to gauge

the current state of Catholic education. Certainly, Catholic schools stand out as unique for their oft-cited higher incidence of intergenerational closure, dense social capital, collegiality, strong academic focus on core subjects, student engagement and teacher commitment, high teacher expectations, decentralized governance, communal organization, shared values and mission, and strong student discipline (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Hunt et al., 2004). As the encyclopedia editors note, however, the current sustainability crisis in Catholic education poses a serious threat to the “common good” promoted by Catholic schools, potentially compromising the common school effect that has been positively associated with the Catholic school system (Bryk et al., 1993), which is also noted by Coleman et al. (1982) as “the paradoxical result that the Catholic schools come closer to the American ideal of...educating all alike, than do public schools” (p. 144). While clearly focused on what is unique to Catholic education, the encyclopedia affords educators across public and private sectors opportunities to learn from the trials and triumphs of the Catholic school experience, as well as from promising present-day research and innovations. Lessons learned can be directed toward the cause of improving education for all children.

In all, the encyclopedia accomplishes its goal of providing the single most comprehensive reference guide available for anyone interested in K-12 Catholic schools, both those with and without extensive background knowledge and/or first-hand experience in these schools. Whether one is involved in the day-to-day work of running Catholic schools (as administrator, teacher, board member, or in some other capacity), educational research, education-related non-profit work, or is personally interested in the topic, this two-volume set provides a wealth of important information about the historical foundations and current situation of Catholic schools, in ways that are both easily accessible and practically applicable.

REFERENCES

- Bryk, A., Lee, V., & Holland, P. B. (1993). *Catholic schools and the common good*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Coleman, J. S., & Hoffer, T. (1987). *Public and private high schools: The impact of communities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Coleman, J. S., Hoffer, T., & Kilgore, S. (1982). *High school achievement: Public, Catholic and private schools compared*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hunt, T. C., Joseph, E. A., & Nuzzi, R. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Catholic schools in the United States: An encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Katie Bennett is a graduate student in sociology at the University of Chicago.