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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS STILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE: TEN YEARS OF RESEARCH 1991-2000

THOMAS C. HUNT, ELLIS A. JOSEPH, RONALD J. NUZZI (EDS.).
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Reviewed by Anthony J. Dosen, C.M., Ph.D.

Thomas Hunt, Ellis Joseph, and Ronald Nuzzi, in their book *Catholic Schools Still Make a Difference*, have provided Catholic educators an excellent, comprehensive source of information about research in Catholic schools. It expands upon John Convey's *Catholic Schools Make a Difference: Twenty-Five Years of Research* (1992), tying together the various conversations that were begun in Convey's volume and providing new threads for students', practitioners', and researchers' reflection. The editors gathered a diverse group of scholars to examine the literature on Catholic school research and collaboratively developed a volume that will provide the reader with a wide range of information and resources about Catholic education.

Especially when read in conjunction with Convey's (1992) volume, *Catholic Schools Still Make a Difference* provides researchers, students, and practitioners with a wealth of information gleaned from over 35 years of Catholic school research as well as a history of the development of Catholic

elementary and secondary education from the 1960s through the turn of the 21st century. The differences between the contents of Convey's (1992) work and Hunt, Joseph, and Nuzzi's (2002) current work are a clear indication of the transitions that have taken place in Catholic education over the past 10 years. For example, Convey (1992) spoke of the development of the faith community and Catholic identity under the rubric of environment in his work, while these issues have become their own chapters in the new book. The chapter on environment focuses more toward issues of institutional change and school reform. These are not criticisms of Convey's work. Rather they demonstrate how the focal issues of research in Catholic education and life in Catholic schools change over the course of years. Those who are familiar with Convey's work will notice the addition of a number of totally new chapters: gifted education, education of students with special needs, learning styles, technology, governance and administration, school choice and a chapter on finance and development.

The book will be a resource for practitioners who must quickly gather pertinent data. But perhaps the greater gift that this edition offers Catholic school practitioners is the possibility of thinking how they might improve practices within Catholic schools. The issues of gifted education, programs for students with special needs, and learning styles addressed in these chapters were especially enlightening. Their discussion of how some Catholic school programs were attempting to meet the needs of gifted and special students and to examine the issue of a diversity of learning styles runs somewhat counterintuitively to my experience of Catholic schools. The conventional wisdom seemed to state that Catholic schools do not do special or gifted education. Practitioners whose schools have not implemented these types of programs can look to this text as a prophetic voice that asks "why not?" and that encouragingly says, "We can do this."

For the student and researcher of Catholic education this volume provides a ready starting point for exploring the review of pertinent research literature. The various editors provide researchers with information about both the plethora and the dearth of research about various aspects of Catholic education. Throughout the reading of this text, I was drawn to the list of references to discover the source of a particular viewpoint, idea, or concept. The current volume highlights a lively interest in the areas of Catholic identity and the principal's role in faith leadership, as well as in educational outcomes, technology, and the role of the laity in Catholic schools. However, this reviewer was dismayed by the lack of research apparent in the areas of Catholic school finances and development. Once again this was not because of a lack on the part of the chapter author or editors, but rather the current state of affairs.

In reporting this information, or lack thereof, the chapter's author, Theodore Wallace, has provided the Catholic school community with a warn-

ing flag. The survival of Catholic schools depends upon how effectively local schools and diocesan districts manage their finances and find alternative sources of funding. Despite the need for good research and reflective practice, Wallace found a dearth of research in the areas of finance and development in Catholic schools.

William Davis, OSFS, in penning the chapter discussing school choice and vouchers, recorded the attraction that the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) and other proponents of Catholic schools have to various voucher and school choice plans. The writing is framed in hope that the Cleveland voucher plan would survive the Supreme Court—which it did. In re-reading these two chapters one after the other, this reviewer was left with a sense of fear. Research around the issues of Catholic school finances and development in Catholic schools has been limited to the voucher system. Effectively, Catholic schools are putting all their eggs in one basket. Issues that have not been addressed in this discussion are those that focus on the implications of federal funding on the Catholic identity of these schools. Researchers interested in studying Catholic identity or Catholic school finance and development issues must question the wisdom of limiting our efforts solely to the voucher/tuition waiver model.

Yes, Catholic schools still make a difference! Catholic schools continue to provide a high quality education to children. They continue to build faith communities and help the next generation in the formation of their faith lives. They build the future upon the sense of vocation that their lay members experience. They have a passion to serve a population that is more diverse and gifted in many ways but includes some who struggle with various physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges to effective learning. Catholic schools also continue the struggle to be even better—more professional, faithful, inclusive and certainly financially self-sustaining. The editors have given the Catholic school community much to celebrate and to reflect upon. They also provide the Catholic school community with a challenge not to be satisfied with the status quo but to continue to grow in fidelity to its mission.

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