

BOOK REVIEWS

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PIONEER MENTORING IN TEACHER PREPARATION: FROM THE VOICES OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS

KEVINA KEATING, CCVI, AND MARY PETER TRAVISS, O.P., NORTH STAR PRESS OF ST. CLOUD, INC., 2001.

Reviewed by Timothy J. Cook

As the number of women religious continues to dwindle, there is a real threat that their legacy will be lost forever if left unrecorded. In response, the first conference on the history of women religious convened in 1989. Since then, researchers have produced several scholarly volumes about the incomparable role women religious have played in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States. Without doubt, Catholic schools would not have grown into the vast network that exists today if it were not for the scores of women religious teachers who staffed these schools for more than a century. How were these generations of women religious trained to teach in Catholic schools? Is there a legacy of teacher preparation that can inform the preparation of Catholic educators today? Keating and Traviss set out to answer these provocative questions in *Pioneer Mentoring in Teacher Preparation*. Using qualitative research methods that involved interviews with 60 women religious representing 12 religious congregations, Keating and Traviss frame a model of teacher preparation that captures the legacy of women religious for the preparation of today's Catholic educators.

Chapter one situates the study of teacher training of women religious within the context of recent efforts to reform teacher education. The authors assert that the methods used by women religious, particularly mentoring, can inform current reform efforts. Chapter two describes the historical development of teacher education of women religious. Until the 1950s, teacher training for women religious could be characterized as a formalized apprenticeship. Most sister-teachers began teaching without a degree or state credential, but they did benefit from a well-developed support system that included mentoring by experienced sister-teachers. Chapter three highlights the common themes that surfaced from the interviews of sister-teachers about their memories of teacher preparation. Most interviewees agreed that the emphasis their

religious communities placed on liberal arts education and mentoring proved to be the most valuable elements of their preparation for teaching. Chapter four concentrates on the role that leaders of religious communities, especially directors of education, played in shaping the education of sister-teachers. Chapter five discusses the impact that the Sister Formation Movement, Vatican II, and the rapid increase of lay teachers have had on religious communities and Catholic schools. Chapter six explains the model that the authors have created to depict teacher education of sister-teachers and the legacy it leaves for current practice.

While conducting their research, Keating and Traviss quickly discovered that teacher preparation of sister-teachers in the 12 religious congregations represented was strikingly similar. Several common themes emerged. The authors translated these themes into essential elements of their pioneer mentoring model. First, religious communities considered teaching a corporate ministry and an extension of a sister's religious vocation. Schools were seen as extensions of convents. "The work of the institute was, next to prayer, the most important thing in a sister's life" (p. 39). Second, religious communities socialized their newer members toward a shared vision and operationalized the vision by establishing rules for everything from holding chalk to relating with students. "To be faithful to the rule was great virtue" (p. 39). Third, neophyte sister-teachers benefited from having experienced sister-teachers as mentors and role models. Demonstration classes whereby experienced teachers would model for neophyte teachers were a common form of learning.

Fourth, community living fostered socialization and broad support of new sister-teachers. Sister-teachers worked on lesson plans together in the community room each evening. The sister-principal checked weekly plans each Sunday. One sister remarked, "This was the single best aspect of my training. I lived in the same house as the master teacher, and we met formally every six days but she was always available during each day" (p. 75). Fifth, sister-teachers credited their religious communities for placing emphasis on their members having a broad liberal arts education. The Sister Formation Movement of the 1950s, which called for sister-teachers to earn their degrees prior to teaching, contributed to sister-teachers becoming arguably the best-educated segment of the Catholic population. Sixth, religious communities promoted lifelong professional growth and viewed continuing education on Saturdays and during summers as valuable and normative.

Although the sister-teacher model that Keating and Traviss present is one of a bygone era, I agree with the authors' assertion that certain elements of that model have meaning for, and would indeed strengthen, the preparation of Catholic lay teachers in a contemporary world. As a teacher educator in a Catholic university, I believe that Catholic higher education must take a leading role in carrying forward the legacy of religious communities relative to the preparation for Catholic educators. It is incumbent upon teacher educa-

tion programs at Catholic colleges and universities to intentionally and systematically foster an appreciation of teaching as a vocation and nurture teacher candidates in their personal spirituality and public ministry. Schools and dioceses must provide experienced mentor teachers to help socialize and guide new teachers in terms of shared vision and practices. In addition, all involved in Catholic education must investigate new models for building communities of faith and learning among teachers today. The Catholic teacher service corps that are springing up at Catholic colleges and universities around the country show great promise for integrating spirituality, community living, and teaching among lay teachers just as religious congregations have done for sister-teachers. Ultimately, Catholic education needs a Lay Teacher Formation Movement to meet contemporary needs the way the Sister Formation Movement met the needs of an earlier era. All of these efforts will help Catholic schools maintain a distinctive identity, that is, a "common culture of uncommon schools" (p. 99).

This publication by Keating and Traviss makes a significant contribution to the field of Catholic education for several reasons. First of all, the research is timely, as teacher education reform has become a prominent item on the nation's education agenda. Moreover, the project is timely in the sense that the research has occurred while data can still be retrieved from those sister-teachers who experienced firsthand the pioneer mentoring method of teacher education. The research is scholarly in its qualitative approach and in its resulting model of teacher education that the authors create. To their credit, the authors acknowledge the limits of the study, including the less than random manner in which the local leaders chose the interviewees. Also, the authors are careful not to glorify teacher education of a bygone era. Instead, they present both the successes and shortcomings of the pioneer mentoring method of sister-teacher preparation.

Finally, the research is interesting and provocative. The personal interviews give a human face to theory and history. The authors afford readers the opportunity to participate in the lives and experiences of our forebears by listening to them tell their compelling stories. Keating and Traviss use their research findings to provoke reflection on how the historical sister-teacher model of teacher education might inform current practice and influence future models of Catholic teacher preparation. In the words of the authors,

It is impossible to listen to these voices, hear their stories, peruse their early rules, review their plan books, be inspired by their dedication to and love for teaching, read letters of gratitude from their students and not conclude that the preparation of these sister-teachers, flawed though it may have been, has a great deal to offer to the search for a teacher education model today. (p. 52)

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