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## TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF POWER RELATIONSHIPS

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*Research exists on the power relationships experienced by teachers in public schools as they interact with each other and with the principal. However, no such studies had been done in non-public schools. What takes place in Catholic schools should be examined because of the significant role these schools have played in the American educational system. The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover how teachers describe their experiences of power relationships as they talked about school-related issues in two Catholic secondary schools for girls. Research methods included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and informal conversations. Data were analyzed according to Nyberg's (1981b) four forms of power theory (force, exchange and bargaining, rhetoric, trust and mutual commitment). The findings suggest that in Catholic schools, securing commitment to the mission through the use of rhetoric is important, perhaps essential. In girls' schools, the trust and mutual commitment form of power is present where there is a collegial shared leadership model, but the force form of power is evident where there is a traditional, hierarchical organizational structure. The exchange and bargaining power form is common among teachers and with the principal in both settings. Insights gained from this study are intended to promote understanding of the personal and social dynamics which support positive power relationships, lead to greater involvement of teachers in substantive decision making, and ultimately benefit students.*

The concept of power both compels and repels us. Power and its consequences are familiar subjects in fiction and nonfiction writing. While a few books explore the idea of power relationships in public education, research with regard to religiously affiliated schools is scant. In both public and nonpublic schools, it seems that the word power is forbidden when con-

nected with the mission of educating youth. Yet the topic of power evokes passionate opinions at any school because teachers and administrators experience power relationships, for good or ill, on a daily basis. Power is inherent in social life: "Whenever at least two people are related in some way relevant to at least one intended action, power is present as a facet of that relationship" (Nyberg as cited in Jacobson and Conway, 1990, p. 52). Manke (1997) adds, "power is a structure of relationships.... The structure of relationships is called power because it, rather than the individuals who create it, is what shapes people's actions" (p. 1). The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover teachers' and principals' experiences of power relationships, through their own words and from images gathered through the observation of teacher interactions in various settings.

## BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR THE STUDY

The extensive research on shared decision making in public education suggests that when teachers participate with a purpose and share in decision making as professionals they evidence deeper commitment to the decisions that emerge and to the implementation of those decisions (Conway, 1984; Conway & Calzi, 1995/1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Ingersoll, 1994, 1996; Lortie, 1975; Nyberg, 1981a, 1981b; Weiss, 1993, 1995). One wonders how this process takes place in Catholic secondary schools. How do teachers articulate their experiences of the power relationships that take place in decision making and in their professional interactions with one another? What if any differences are expressed when they speak about interactions with the principal?

On the one hand, a priority within Catholic schools has been the development of a strong community, encompassing teachers, administrators, students, and to some extent staff and parents—an aspect that Peshkin calls the "community-maintenance function" (1986, p. 13). The sense of mission and shared purpose evident in many Catholic schools develops an environment that can support the sharing of power. On the other hand, the pyramidal, hierarchical organizational structure of these schools can inhibit the development of positive power relationships for teachers. In a well respected study of Catholic secondary schools, this inconsistency is evident as the notion of "paternalistic control" is raised:

Inside the school, considerable deference is accorded to the principal. In daily operations, the principal's decision making tends to have a paternalistic quality, which at its best is like a wise and caring parent. Traditionally, this mode of leadership typified the religious control of Catholic high schools, where until very recent times, religious members have held the principalship almost exclusively. Much of the flavor of paternalistic control

remains today, even as lay members increasingly take on the principalship. (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993, p. 300)

There is a paradox between the notion of community, implying shared power, and a hierarchical structure, implying control and power over another. The findings of this study provide insights into how teachers see themselves as powerful, powerless, or something in between as they work in Catholic secondary schools. The study's primary research question was: How do teachers in two Catholic secondary schools describe their experiences of power relationships as they talk about decision making? To what do they attribute their particular experiences?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I chose Nyberg's theory (1981a, 1981b, 1990) of the forms of power as a framework from which to analyze teachers' experiences because: 1) his analysis pares the concept of power down to its most basic forms, 2) he focuses on the notion of consent, and 3) his work examines how power is enacted in education. Nyberg maintains that power is an energy form which is socially enacted (Pfeffer, 1992; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989); it is morally neutral [like fire, light, wind]; and it concerns achieving intended consequences, often in an organizational setting (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Galbraith, 1983; Hartsock, 1998). In Nyberg's (1981a, 1981b, 1990) analysis, simplified for the purpose of this article, power takes four forms:

- Force: the actual or threatened use of physical harm to win consent from the otherwise unwilling
- Exchange and bargaining: the offer of reward for services
- Rhetoric: power is achieved by a person creating a belief in a plan
- Trust and mutual commitment: two or more people with the same plan who share all information relevant to that plan and who trust each other

Consent, defined as the giving (or withholding) of permission or approval, is as Nyberg (1981b) asserts, "a critical link in [the] power relationships" that take place in Catholic secondary schools (p. 85). Many of these schools tend to be loosely structured in the sense that members of the teaching faculties may be nontenured, contractual agreements are made annually, and there is no guaranteed renewal of contract. There is little legal recourse if the contract breaks down. However, as Nyberg argues, while the power of a governing body is great, it is no greater than the power of those who give majority consent to withdraw that consent. Consent then, is a form of control over power (Nyberg, 1981b).

## DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

This study took place at two Catholic secondary schools for young women located in a mid-sized city in the northeast United States. The schools and the participants in this study have been given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Corpus Christi Academy was selected as a site because of its fine reputation as a college preparatory school and, in part, because there is a well defined, shared decision-making process in the school. The second site was Mater Dei Academy, a school with both similarities to and differences from Corpus Christi Academy. Similarities include strong ties to the sponsoring order and a fairly good academic reputation as a college preparatory school. Both schools have a religious sister as the head of the school; both have governing boards; and both serve middle-class families. Corpus Christi draws about 375 students from nearby suburban areas, and Mater Dei has a mix of approximately 160 urban and suburban students. Both schools seemed likely to exhibit certain factors identified in school effectiveness research such as (1) strong instructional leadership by the principal, (2) clear instructional focus, (3) high expectations and standards, (4) a safe and orderly climate, and (5) frequent monitoring of student achievement (Steller, 1988). Both schools also seemed likely to exhibit characteristics identified for many Roman Catholic schools, such as a consistent vision, philosophy, and mission; qualified, dedicated teachers; a commitment to learning for both teachers and students; a mix of students from different social and educational backgrounds; and significant parental involvement (Convey, 1992).

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data gathering took place from January through April 2000. The faculty sample of both new and experienced teachers was comprised of one quarter of the teachers in each school. The principal and 14 teachers at Corpus Christi and the principal and 12 teachers at Mater Dei were interviewed, representing a cross section of the academic disciplines. Since similar research in a male or coeducational school might yield contrary results because of gender-based perceptions (Lee, Loeb, & Marks, 1995), single-gender schools for women were chosen for this study.

Community usually involves several constituencies such as the sponsoring religious community, students, parents, board members, alumnae, staff, and the neighboring community as well as teachers. However, this study was limited in scope to teachers and principals.

As a product of Catholic education from elementary through college levels, past principal of a Catholic secondary school for young women, and administrator in other Catholic elementary and secondary schools for over 20 years, I have a framework for understanding the internal workings of Catholic

education. I have endeavored to portray the perceptions of the faculty as a group as well as the beliefs of individual teachers as objectively as possible. I hoped that my shared common experience of powerlessness when my ideas were summarily dismissed and powerfulness when my ideas were respectfully considered would help me to listen attentively to others' words.

A participant observation method was used as one data collection strategy (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). I was identified as a researcher, but the interaction I had with participants was limited primarily to the interview sessions. A second data collection method was the use of informal, friendly conversations. Third, semi-structured interviews were used to obtain individual perceptions of activities, feelings, motivations, concerns, and thoughts about decision making. Questions which I developed were used to guide the interviews. This method provided comparable data across academic subjects and between the schools (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). There were two sets of semi-structured interviews with the same teachers. Principals were asked the same questions as the teachers. The first interview questions focused on teachers' perceptions about decision making around curriculum and policy issues, while the second set of interview questions was directed toward their experiences of power relationships. Several teachers were hesitant to talk about power, expressing discomfort at using a word which for them had negative connotations. To solve this unanticipated problem, I used a definition by feminist author Jean Baker Miller (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991), who described power as "the capacity to produce a change" (p. 198).

Data were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, coded using Nud\*ist software, and sorted into 28 categories. These categories were compressed to three major themes: consent, perceptions of powerfulness, and perceptions of powerlessness. I looked for those comments which could be grouped because of their relevance to the conceptual framework of Nyberg's power theory, those which best represented the teachers' concerns and insights, and those which were significant when analyzed against my own background in Catholic education. Major categories received code names (e.g., collegiality, force, rhetoric, exchange, trust, principal leadership). In two instances, minor categories, namely "the extras" and "money issues," helped to define the unique level of dedication and commitment of the teachers in this study and, for this reason, became part of this study.

## FINDINGS

This study was not intended to be comparative. However, at each school three aspects emerged which were particularly important for the Catholic school environment: organizational structure, attention to mission, and level of consent given by teachers.

It was apparent that there is more of a hierarchical organizational pattern at Mater Dei Academy. At Corpus Christi there is a shared leadership structure and an emphasis on collegiality and connectedness. This model is more typical of women's experiences of relationship (Gilligan, 1982). Both of these types of organization affect teachers' individual and collective perceptions of powerfulness and powerlessness.

According to Nyberg (Jacobson & Conway, 1990), power is an energy force, morally neutral and socially enacted, which brings about intended consequences. Rhetoric is a form of power achieved by a person who creates a belief in a plan. If the plan for Catholic schools calls for creating a belief in the expressed mission of the school, uniting the various constituencies of the school in a common purpose, then rhetoric, whether spoken, written, or nonexistent, is a critically important factor. Therefore, I focused on the presence or absence of mission-related rhetoric in each school since the degree to which teachers own the mission of a school affects how they think about power.

In addition, teachers' perceptions of powerfulness and powerlessness are rooted in what they allow and, in some way, agree can take place, and why they agree, regarding matters about which they are concerned. The findings with regard to both schools suggest that the level of consent teachers give within power relationships is important to the maintenance of those power forms which are enacted by, upon, or with them.

## CONSENT AT MATER DEI ACADEMY

One way of describing a Catholic secondary school is as a voluntary community (Bryk et al., 1993). Teachers and students choose the school and are chosen for membership in the school. Members of the community generally elect to abide by the specific ideology articulated in the mission and philosophy. The mission is the rallying point around which members gather and from which they draw inspiration. Nyberg (1981b) suggested that: "Anyone interested in maintaining an institutional form of power would do well to keep in mind that consent informed by at least some understanding of the institution's purposes is necessary for both efficiency and stability" (p. 51). When teachers subscribe to the set of core values contained in the mission statement, they demonstrate an understanding of and a commitment to what they are being called to do. They enjoy a sense of solidarity with others in the school and tend to remain at the school. The question of mission was directly asked of all the teachers and the principal at Mater Dei. Dianna, who had served on a committee to revise the mission statement, remarked:

I think a lot of times when we look at our mission and whom we are trying to educate.... If we are going to take in students with less ability, if we're not a...college prep school...any longer, which I think is a change in our focus

over the years.... That has become our mission, or that's been defined as our mission, and so...that is always in the back of our minds.

I asked her if her remarks would be understood by most teachers in the building. She answered that she did not know. Several teachers avoided the topic; others were unsure of how the mission statement might impact school-wide decisions and decisions about curriculum. As one veteran noted: "I think we just probably, at some sort of subliminal level, know what the mission and philosophy are, and you just kind of keep that in mind. You don't hear about that all that much." Rachel, a newcomer, simply said "I don't hear much about the mission and philosophy of the school." In the view of McLaughlin, O'Keefe, and O'Keefe (1996), "the underlying values, shared by its members, provide the animating force for the entire enterprise" (p. 73). My findings support the contention that the discourse of mission at Mater Dei rarely takes place. It can be argued that it is missing. From the majority of teachers' responses, one must question if the transmission of core values and the nurturance of community were happening.

Some informal transmission of core values is probably occurring in other ways. For example, Gennie, who has a deep love for the school as well as a 35-year commitment to Mater Dei, said:

There is a sense of ownership.... And you are going to do the best job you can according to the parameters the people who own the business set up, because this is what you love and want to do all your life. So you have to work within those parameters sometimes.

She has no doubt shared these feelings with colleagues. However, for the most part, there does not seem to be a successful translation of the formal mission into practice (McLaughlin et al., 1996). Understanding the basic purpose of the school, why Mater Dei exists and what makes the school unique, is not a major consent factor for more than two or three teachers who were interviewed.

The data presented concerning teachers' perceptions of power at Mater Dei Academy are best understood when analyzed in the light of Nyberg's conceptual framework (1981a, 1981b, 1990; Nyberg & Farber, 1986) of the four forms of power for, as he argues, "power must be judged by its effects" (1981a, p. 41). Two power forms, trust and mutual commitment and rhetoric, are less significant in the experiences of Mater Dei teachers.

## **TRUST AND MUTUAL COMMITMENT**

Involvement with one another creates a culture of teaching within which meaning, support, and identity develop among teachers (Hargreaves, 1994). Little in the teachers' interviews led me to believe that the trust and mutual

commitment form of power exists at Mater Dei. Laetitia described the one department which has a unified focus:

We have three teachers in [our] department [and] we work very closely together.... In our department, when we need to make changes in the curriculum, they are generally small changes in classes which already exist and we just get together as a department. We do a lot of informal stuff because we don't have a time when all three of us are free, but we all teach in the same space. So we do a lot of [department] business between classes.

Apart from this exception, Mater Dei teachers claimed that they seldom interact with one another outside perfunctory pleasantries, although most teachers regard the older sisters in the building in a loving way. There are some enduring friendships among the cohort of veterans, but the friendly banter that close colleagues enjoy does not happen at this school. Little meaningful professional conversation takes place, nor are teachers involved in any way with one another's work, other than at the superficial level of cordial acquaintanceship. At Mater Dei, there is more of a sense of isolation among teachers than camaraderie. Rachel observed: "My feeling is that a lot of times teachers [here] just stay in their compartments." This isolation extends to teachers' relationships with the principal, whom they identify as a *laissez-faire* leader as constrained as they are by outside pressures. Sister Mary Ellen is liked but is not considered to be on close terms with her staff.

## RHETORIC

There is a rhetoric that exists at Mater Dei Academy. One hears words and phrases such as "teamwork," "communication," and "being able to take part in decision-making processes" from the principal and some teachers. The principal explained:

There are some decisions...where I would have to call a spade a spade, or make the final decision on things. Maybe that will come up once in a while. But on the whole, like I said, I'm much more the kind of a person who believes in a team effort.... The administrative council...help[s] out in a lot of the decisions. We discuss and get a broader picture.

As one listens closely, the notion of teamwork flows out of a monologue given by some member of the administration, rather than through a dialogue between individuals or the faculty group. Communication is decidedly one way, from "[those] who can speak with authority, [to] those who must listen" (McLaren as cited in Kreisberg, 1992, p. 34). Comments such as "It's not up for discussion" and "It's a done deal" are voiced by several interviewees. In the perception of many teachers "being able to take part in decision-making



processes" refers to decisions about procedural matters such as whether or not to dismiss students after a full morning assembly.

In Catholic schools, stories about God, the Catholic heritage, and how Christians are called to serve one another are essential messages linking members of the community with one another. No doubt these stories are shared with students in Mater Dei religion classes and during religious activities; however, there is a notable absence of storytelling and anecdotes about school life. Little is said to encourage identity with the school and its history. Veteran teachers recall a past philosophy from a decade ago, and that prior knowledge still informs their planning. Unless they are members of the sponsoring religious congregation, new teachers have little idea of what principles the school embraces or what is its particular niche in the larger community. This is critically important because teacher buy-in to what a school advocates often makes the difference for a novice teacher between choosing to remain at the school and seeking employment elsewhere. Nothing I heard during the interviews or at meetings, where the mission and philosophy were presented, would stimulate commitment to take root or be strengthened. I would suggest therefore, that the rhetoric form of power is minimally experienced at Mater Dei Academy.

## **FORCE**

Of the two remaining forms in evidence at Mater Dei, I suggest that the force form of power contributes to teachers' perceptions of power relationships. At Mater Dei, there are no overt threats or physical violence. Subtle indicators, however, suggest that psychological force, intentional or not, is a form of power which affects the minds and hearts of the entire faculty. There are sanctions which compel obedience, actions which can be construed as repressive, and attitudes that emerge from within the hierarchical structure which limit and confine. The relationship of teachers to the external governing board was compelling. This, from teachers' descriptions is the "other entity with a voice and no face." Mater Dei teachers experienced uncertainty and believed they were being controlled by this external entity which seemed, in their estimation, to be purposefully vague. Dianna explained the School Planning Team noting:

The director for that is outside the building. There are several people from outside the building [who come] in to guide the discussion.... And so it has been a very varied experience being on this. I lose focus as to what we are really supposed to be doing...I don't really know my role. I have an uneasy feeling because I don't know what's happening.

Gennie reflected:

I don't know how much interfering they do, but the less they do the better it is for this place. But I always feel like there's that arm reaching out from the other side, and it's like there's someone in control who doesn't have a face.... And it's not that I don't like them, or not that I don't want their support, but sometimes I get the sense that they don't trust the people they've put here to do the job.

Teachers' notions about the governance structure and performance expectations held by the board are unclear, especially with regard to how much input they are "allowed," to use one teacher's word, and to what extent that input will be considered. Those on the Members' Board or Board of Trustees are "seen around the school" but they are neither available nor accessible. Faculty members at Mater Dei are united in one impression, and that is, that the board is watching. As Sister John put it: "I also have lived with the sense...of being under a microscope—like everybody's watching. Like being in a fish bowl and you're the fish."

Community should be one distinguishing characteristic of Catholic secondary schools. According to St. Benedict, members living in community experience stability, connectedness, and equilibrium. Several teachers at Mater Dei suggested that their experience is one of insecurity and powerlessness. Several times I heard teachers use the phrase "I feel uneasy" or as Joanne asserted "I just don't feel especially good about this [decision].... They did ask us, but I don't know how much our opinion is going to be considered." They feel "left out of the loop a lot." They have information which is ambiguous and sometimes unreliable. Laetitia noted that "when it comes to the other things, information gets hoarded. It is the scarce resource here, and so information is a kind of currency for power." In the exchange of information, it appears that teachers are regularly shortchanged on their end of the bargain. The governing boards at Mater Dei Academy no doubt have good intentions regarding the academy; however, the resulting effects are depressing for veteran teachers and often traumatic for new teachers. Both groups feel undervalued.

## **EXCHANGE AND BARGAINING**

There are always two components in the exchange and bargaining equation. On the one hand are the teachers and the benefits they seek; on the other hand are those who need the expertise of colleagues. There is little to suggest that the typical rewards for teachers are in place at Mater Dei. Teachers commented on minimal support from one another and little administrative support when there is a problem. Laetitia related:

You take something like a parental complaint.... I've had a couple of situations when I have really felt like I am sort of on my own to answer this par-

ent's question, and I didn't get the feeling that I had the school behind me—that it was my job to either sink or swim in this situation.... We all sort of feel that way: that it is really important to do stuff to kind of protect yourself, because if it comes to you and the parent face-to-face, it's going to be you all by yourself.

There is scant encouragement for new teachers and new ideas. When Rachel began a writing center, her creative idea was thwarted, as Rob, a young teacher, explained:

I know we have had some attempts by some of the newer teachers to do a couple of things which didn't last all that long. There was a writing center; it didn't last very long. Of course it was never officially closed, but the room was taken away. Yeah. It's a great idea, we're all for it, but you can't have a place to do it.

I heard little in the way of praise or recognition for teachers' work, apart from one comment made by the principal that some teachers have "the care for the students that a really dedicated teacher has...[and these] are the people who are not counting the cost."

Most teachers do, however, stay at the school from year to year, which suggests a mutually beneficial exchange. While teachers express uncertainty and unease about those issues that seem out of their control in the larger school community, they do not hedge when it comes to their passion—teaching. Veteran teachers at Mater Dei expressed a great deal of satisfaction regarding what happens in their classrooms. This theme was succinctly stated by Laetitia:

I like it that we really have a lot of control over what goes on in our classrooms and control over curriculum, control over our textbooks. That's all done within the department and that makes me much more invested in those decisions.... It also means that if I want to do something different in my class that that is okay, and there is a lot of support for that and it doesn't matter how off the wall it is.

The bargain that is struck under these conditions produces positive results in the eyes of the teachers and principal, especially since the "other entity" (i.e., external governing board), while having a great deal of power and influence over the whole school, does not generally interfere in classroom operations.

Most teachers at Mater Dei Academy experienced independence and some personal power in their interactions with students. However, the power to bring about meaningful change was ended at the four walls of their classroom. Outside of those boundaries, the teachers and principal saw themselves as dependent on the decisions of others. Teachers at Mater Dei described their

experience of power outside the classroom as top-down hierarchical relationships. When asked in what other ways she felt teachers exercised decision-making influence, Laetitia recounted a telling example:

Occasionally, there will be something that comes out of the [administrative team] meetings to vote on. But it tends to come out as—this is what we figured out in staff meeting, do you approve, kind of thing. And it's certainly open for discussion and you don't have to vote for it. There's not real pressure to vote for it, but it is delivered as something that has been worked out. So you're basically giving your stamp of approval, or raising questions that maybe hadn't been thought of.

Because the faculty is not a part of the larger decision-making process and they do not have a sense of the overall purpose and direction of the school, they are less autonomous. They are tethered rather than free to be involved in determining a common purpose and direction which would bring about a preferred future for this school. Gennie viewed this pragmatically:

Mater Dei changes very slowly.... You have just kind of resigned yourself to doing things their way—that's the feeling. This is [their] school and [they] are going to do whatever [they] see fit.... You don't feel totally powerless, but you still have to come to the realization that it's not your business, let's say.

Senge (1990) maintained that “when people throughout an organization come to share in a larger sense of purpose, they are united in a common destiny. They have a sense of continuity and identity not achievable in any other way” (p. 354). At this time in the history of Mater Dei Academy, the faculty do not see themselves as involved in a larger sense of purpose and consider themselves powerless rather than powerful.

## **CONSENT AT CORPUS CHRISTI ACADEMY**

Bryk et al. (1993) found that in the Catholic secondary schools they studied each school “possessed a relatively high degree of autonomy in managing its own affairs” (p. 312), so that what takes place in the school is largely the result of traditional practices and the judgments of those who work in the school. This is true for Corpus Christi Academy. The principal commented: “I think that the more people have to say and the more they are part of the process, the more it is theirs.” Veterans and some new teachers expressed a strong sense of identity, ownership, and investment, attitudes which signify consent. Anne saw it as a mutual endeavor:

I think it all works together. If the atmosphere is conducive to you feeling

that you've got...a stake in the matter, it is much easier to do whatever you are capable of doing for a student, or for a school.... [It] implies not only just the atmosphere, but what kind of support [you can expect when problems arise].

For Maureen, consent was closely connected with her sense of ownership:

After 20 years I think I have quite the investment here.... I feel like I am part of the community and that I belong here.... What happens here affects what happens in the rest of my life, too. I mean the place has become...a part of me.

Corpus Christi teachers trust one another, share similar values, derive personal support from one another, and are willing to make sacrifices for the good of the whole. Each teacher is aware of the differential between what they earn and what colleagues in public schools earn. Despite this reality, they have cast their lot with Catholic education, particularly as it is practiced at Corpus Christi. They are committed to the school, to the students, and to each other as Joe's words illustrated:

I'd have to say it has to be [love of what you are doing]. It is not the pay.... I tell my students that you have to do what you love, and you have to love what you do.... I think most of the teachers who are here...have a great love, a great motivation to do this.

These qualities represent a form of active consent that is close to commitment through informed judgment. The attitudes of the majority of teachers interviewed reflect willing, loyal consent. There may be others who consent because they conform out of habit or custom, but there are no data to support this contention.

The members of the academic council, mostly experienced teachers, comprised a powerful coalition. Because I only observed one meeting of this group, it isn't possible to assess the impact of this coalition either as preservers of the status quo or as change agents. However, they have a more conservative approach to problem solving as principal Sister Caroline observed:

I think that is the hardest thing when people have been in a place for such a long time.... You tend to just get into a plodding way of doing things where it is comfortable and it has worked but there still might be a better way of doing things.

As a group, they may be willing to undertake only those changes which will not inconvenience the accepted ways of doing things. This contention is supported by another of Sister Caroline's comments:

Sometimes it is like a dearth of ideas or a dearth of energy.... If people come with a good idea or want to make a change or suggestion, it is rare that it wouldn't happen. I think...people have their plates so full that we miss [opportunities]. It is hard to generate enthusiasm for new ideas or new ways or anything new or different.

In instances such as these, the principal is actually rendered less powerful, since she is at the mercy of both the good will of her teachers and the collective power of the group. This is a consent issue as well. When teachers or the department chairperson elect not to do something that the principal favors, to some extent their attitudes reflect a withdrawal of consent to her leadership.

The relationships of the participants in this school were friendly, collegial, and inclusive. There was an ethic of caring among the adult members of the community. Teachers commented with pride on the family-like atmosphere at Corpus Christi. Friendships with one another, in and outside of school, abounded. Meetings were lively, noisy, social events where faculty and staff were obviously glad to be together. When personal tragedy or disaster struck, the community rallied around in support. Most teachers interviewed remarked about how much they appreciated being a part of this teaching community. Catherine said she liked the atmosphere because "everyone on the faculty [gets] along. It is just so rare that everyone works so well with everybody [else]." Joe commented that teachers are constantly asked for input at department meetings and at faculty meetings. He noted: "I think in that arena I don't see any top down. It is very bottom upward or at least a compromise between the two." Within the relationships that grow out of principal to teacher interactions and among teachers, all of the forms of power identified by Nyberg (1981a, 1981b) were in evidence to some extent.

## **FORCE**

Evidence of the force form of power was minimal. There was a slight degree of perceived psychological intimidation within teacher interactions. Ada remarked that there was an expectation that harmony and consensus will prevail in the faculty dining room and that there was little tolerance on the part of her colleagues for "venting." Her comments, while legitimate, did not appear to refer to an organized strategy to control faculty dissension.

## **EXCHANGE AND BARGAINING**

The exchange and bargaining form of power is the usual way the business of school takes place. There is a reward for services rendered. At Corpus Christi, teachers indicate various rewards which served as compensation for their work, such as a comfortable teaching environment. Ada highlighted meaningful involvement as a benefit: "We are asked our opinions, we are asked to

contribute...our expertise. I think the faculty plays a big part." Sister Lydia pointed out:

You can create the kind of setting that you want in your room, in your area, and it has to do with more than your subject matter.... That is a plus.... Teachers feel good about that or they would be really grumbling, if they did not have autonomy to run their own thing. And yet it is in sync with the policy and the mission statement of the school.

However, even in a setting where teachers believed they have the freedom and the capacity to produce change, there were issues upon which limits to that power were imposed. At Corpus Christi Academy, there was one area in which numerous teachers reported feeling undervalued. It was in the contested area of student discipline. The result of nonsupport by administration, in Joe's estimation, was powerlessness for "when a teacher makes a dictate, whether it is disciplinary or whatever, the kids see that the teacher's ruling doesn't really matter all that much...and it affects other students in the room."

Rich agreed:

I don't think that there is uniformity in the discipline and I think that could be better.... I think that maybe relying on one person [as disciplinarian] is not the ideal way to go. I think maybe a group or committee [would be better]—Okay, a student did this, how are we going to end up consequencing this?

He added:

I think there is a lot of conflict [with regard to discipline]...and I think sometimes it is not best for the students. I think there might be some people there in the outside world who might not see us as "community" as far as some of the things we do with discipline are concerned.

## RHETORIC

Rhetoric is a form of power enacted by a person or persons who create a belief in a plan. The beliefs, attitudes, and values of another or others must be influenced to the extent that they are willing to put one's plan into effect (Nyberg, 1981a). Hargreaves (1994) asserted that "missions build motivation and missions bestow meaning" (p. 163). At Corpus Christi Academy, the mission and philosophy as the operative plan forged common beliefs and purposes within the teaching community. It was well known by teachers and frequently mentioned at faculty meetings, student assemblies, and committee meetings. Joe paraphrased the mission this way: "We have three goals here, wisdom, maturity, and grace, and I think we work very hard here on a variety of levels and forms in this school to kind of initiate that kind of change [in students' lives]." He interpreted the school's mission as set apart from, and

perhaps above, a general societal mission of educating children to be productive members of society. More important for Joe was his assessment that his personal teaching goals were congruent with the mission of Corpus Christi Academy:

I believe that part of the reason I work here [is that] it was outlined as to what the philosophy and mission of the school was, [as well as] understanding...the job of teaching.... I think this has worked out for the benefit of both of us [him and the school] because we share those goals—seeing the same thing happen with the girls. That is incredibly important to me, and I think [that for] the role that I play within my department, or as a part of the teaching community—it also works out the same way.

Nyberg (1981b) asserted that a person who is good at using words to turn ideas into mental images is a person of great potential power. It is the effective use of rhetoric by the principal as she clearly and regularly interpreted the mission that keeps this school community focused on its core purposes. The images used by teachers identified the principal as the central hub in the wheel. It was not so much the force of her personality, which she calls “low key,” but her absolute conviction of what the school was trying to accomplish that makes her essential to the success of the educational effort. Sister Caroline’s power seemed to reside in her spiritual centeredness. She used every opportunity, whether consciously or not, to tell the story of what Corpus Christi stands for, the “whole community aspect,” as she calls it, as well as “to be attentive to [individual] needs.” The principal told the stories that create a belief, impart a sense of meaning, and ultimately build commitment to a particular way of educating (Nyberg, 1981b). Nora offered this analysis:

When you have a religious order running a school, that religious mission and that order is the driving force and the heart and soul of the school.... That makes it very special and worthwhile. It also makes it somewhat impervious to the lay voice.... I don’t know that you would really want to change that because it is a strength. It is also a weakness.... It’s both. I guess the only solution to that is to have leadership that is open to the lay voice.

Based on the central reference point of the mission, stability was a characteristic of the school environment. This is important for the advancement of Christian community as Simon (1962) argued:

By the very fact that a community is comprised of a number of individuals, the unity of its action cannot be taken for granted; it has to be caused. Further, if the community is to endure, the cause of its united actions must be firm and stable. (p. 32)



While it is true that stability can deteriorate into inflexibility, it is also true that a stable environment is the most appropriate setting in which relationships of trust and commitment to one another and to a common cause can grow (Nyberg, 1981a). For these reasons I suggest that the positive use of rhetoric, primarily by the principal, is the power form that predominates at Corpus Christi.

## TRUST AND MUTUAL COMMITMENT

Nyberg (1981b) maintained that the trust and mutual commitment form of power is more likely to occur as a consequence of or even along with another form of power. At Corpus Christi Academy, in many instances, the positive use of the rhetoric form of power by the principal enabled trust and mutual commitment to develop. Sister Caroline stated:

[It is in] having things happen at the lowest level.... If teachers can do what they do, do what they are supposed to do well—that's great. Then I don't have to interfere in the process.... [It] is creating an environment in which [teachers] feel they have a say in what goes on in their everyday life. And I do think I try to do that.

Within an environment that is trusting and supportive, there should be room for difference and dissent (McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993); and informed, principled dissent is accepted at Corpus Christi. For example, Nora was recognized for her prophetic words by Sister Caroline:

You know, the prophet's voice is just really good to hear. We have someone in the English department and she drives us crazy. We laugh about it. She is a freshman teacher and she is in her second year, and you would think that no freshman could possibly have passed English before she got here. But it is good to have that voice, because she has lots of good ideas, and lots of concerns and [she] will probably prod us to make [some changes].

With regard to the lesser, though important, goals or plans that take place among the faculty members, there was evidence to support the presence of this form of power, mostly within strong, cohesive departments. Within these faculty subgroups teachers worked out curricular challenges and wrestled with the requirements of changing state standards. Maureen remarked that she relied on the collective wisdom of her department to formulate a stance that was consistent with her personal goals and objectives, and to speak in one voice on important issues. However, Bryk et al. (1993) argued that "the collective must be sufficiently strong to engage individuals, but must also recognize the individuality of each person" (p. 315). This was also characteristic of the Corpus Christi faculty. While the faculty is relatively homogeneous,

there was ample evidence in the data suggesting that individual personalities and voices were respected. Jackie said, "I think the majority of faculty would tell you that they do feel that they [and their concerns] are heard."

## CONCLUSION

Enabling teachers to grow in a sense of ownership toward the schools in which they teach is essential to fostering the Catholic educational plan. In view of the low compensation for their work, teachers who commit to the school community for a number of years do so as a matter of the heart rather than the head.

John Henry Newman, in *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, spoke of the immense power of rhetoric when he said:

The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us. (as cited in Heft, 1997, p. 31)

Heft (1997) suggested that in Catholic schools teachers enter not just the minds of students, but their hearts as well. In the same way, the central purpose of the educational mission of the school must enter the minds and hearts of all involved in the enterprise. Therefore, rhetoric is a fundamental and necessary enactment of power in Catholic schools. When positive rhetoric is enacted, sense and meaning about the unique mission of the school for teachers, students, and parents are developed. This seems to be the case at Corpus Christi Academy. When there is little rhetoric concerning the essential mission of the school—why we do the things we do—as seems to be the case at Mater Dei Academy, no sense of unity is created; nor is there meaning imparted to teachers' work beyond the broad purpose of educating youth.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR A RESEARCH STUDY OF DECISION MAKING IN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

Did you attend and graduate from Catholic grade school/high school/college or university?

How many years have you been teaching?

Number of years in public school?

Number of years in Catholic school?

Number of years at this school?

Are you a graduate of this school?

Are you a member, moderator, or chairperson of any ad hoc or continuing committees in this school?

Why did you choose to teach in this school?

Would you comment on your reasons for choosing to stay at this school?

Both formal and informal decisions are part of the decision-making process. From your vantage point as a teacher, describe the process in which decisions about curriculum are made in your department, in this school.

How has decision making changed, if at all, in the last 5 or 10 years? Why do you think this is?

At what point(s) are teachers involved in decision making? In initiating, input, implementation?

How important is it, if at all, that teachers are involved in the decision-making process?

To what extent does the way in which you personally share in decision making at this school contribute to your overall satisfaction as a faculty member in this school?

Apart from formal group decisions, in what other ways do teachers exercise decision-making influence in this school?

Where does the role of the principal fit in the decision-making process?

Do you see the role of the principal as the same for all kinds of decision making?

To what extent do you see the principal functioning in other aspects of decision making, such as initiating, mandating, inviting, informing, suggesting, supporting?

What other factors in your estimation impact on the curriculum decision-making process, such as the mission and philosophy of the school, past practices and procedures, the requirements of the state education department, other teachers' opinions?

To what extent do new teachers make their voices heard in the decision-making process?

In your opinion, does teaching experience or longevity in the school have a significant impact on the decision-making process?

How do you feel about conflict in the decision-making process?

How would you improve the decision-making process?

Are there other voices which need to be included?

To what extent would you consider yourself to have investment (defined as spending time, effort with the expectation of some satisfaction) in this school? What reasons would you give for this?

To what extent do teachers in your school:

discuss teaching practice?

observe or critique one another's work?

work together on planning?

In your opinion, do you see the teachers in this school unique or typical of other Catholic secondary schools? Why?

Is there anything you would like to add?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR A RESEARCH STUDY OF TEACHERS' RELATIONSHIPS IN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOLS**

In general, thinking of your regular work situation, what role would you prefer to play: independent worker, subordinate, team member, leader? Please explain.

In general, thinking of your regular work situation, whose goals do you work to accomplish: other teachers' goals, administrative goals, your own goals, mutual goals? Please explain.

Who sets the goals for the school?

To what extent do teachers in this school generally feel responsible for achieving the school's goals? Why?

Thinking of one current, specific plan or goal that you would like to achieve, how do you gain support from those who can be helpful to you?

Thinking of your ability to accomplish your own planned goals with the support of others, how effective do you currently feel on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1=not effective and 5=very effective? Why?

How effective do you think others perceive you are?

What do you consider to be the most motivating factor for you as a teacher?

What motivates teachers to work hard?

Thinking about a principal's work style, that is, from directive to facilitative to laissez-faire (letting people work without interference), with which style do you work best?

How would you describe your working relationship with your principal?

Have there been any key moments or times as a teacher, apart from what happens in the classroom, that you have felt you have made a difference in what happens in this school? Please explain.

Is there an issue about which you would feel compelled to speak out? Would voicing your beliefs make a difference? Why or why not?

One definition of power is that power is the capacity to produce a change. Using this or any definition you prefer, in your estimation, how powerful do teachers in Catholic secondary schools think they are? Why?

Recent Catholic school literature states that teachers in Catholic high schools, regardless of their personal religious affiliation, are generally committed to teaching values and concepts consistent with the Roman Catholic tradition.

Would you comment on this statement with regard to your own commitment and generally on that of other teachers in this school, to this belief system?

How would you describe the sense of power you feel here in terms of feelings, thoughts, behaviors?

We hear a lot about teacher empowerment these days. How would you define or describe this notion?

Is there anything you would like to add?