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# Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry & Practice: A Ten-Year Retrospective Review of Catholic Educational Research

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## ARTICLES

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# ***CATHOLIC EDUCATION: A JOURNAL OF INQUIRY AND PRACTICE: A TEN-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE REVIEW OF CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH***

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*This journal has a brief but important history, encompassing the support of major Catholic colleges and universities across the United States. In particular, the University of Dayton and the University of Notre Dame have provided a home for the editorial offices and the contributed services of the editors. As the journal prepares for a transition to its third home at Boston College, this article offers a summative and evaluative overview of the contents of the journal since its inception. Recommendations are offered regarding ways to continue to grow the field of educational research situated in Catholic schools.*

## INTRODUCTION

**C***atholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* is a refereed journal—the only one of its kind in the United States—devoted exclusively to Catholic education from K-12 through higher education. *Catholic Education* (hereafter *Journal*) was founded in 1996 through the collaborative efforts of the University of Dayton, Saint Louis University, Fordham University, and the University of San Francisco (Nuzzi, 2004). Two individuals in particular held preeminent leadership roles in the establishment of the *Journal*: Sr. Mary Peter Traviss, O.P., then Director of the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership at the University of San Francisco, and the Rev. James Heft, S.M., then provost at the University of Dayton. Also instrumental to the *Journal's* growth and organizational development was the University of Dayton's commitment to extend for one year its stewardship of the *Journal*.<sup>1</sup>

The original start-up funds for the *Journal's* operational expenses were provided by the Lilly Foundation. The *Journal* is supported by a governing board and an advisory board. It is published quarterly and is formally supported by 20 Catholic universities. The original editorship of the *Journal* (1997-1998) was provided by William F. Losito and Joseph F. Rogus. Since 1998, Thomas C. Hunt and Ronald J. Nuzzi have shared editing responsibilities. The *Journal* is currently indexed in the *Catholic Periodical and Literature Index*, *Education Research Complete*, and *Education Abstracts Full Text*. The fourfold mission of the *Journal* is to: (a) present selected research studies that relate to the purposes and practices of Catholic education; (b) stimulate discussion exploring important issues that challenge the field; (c) challenge Catholic educators to rethink from an inquiry orientation their positions on the major questions confronting their institutions and their unique traditions; and (d) nourish the ministerial role of educators by exploring the relationship between Christian faith and professional practice. The readership of the *Journal* has grown since its founding to over 85 institutional subscriptions and more than 550 individual subscriptions with both domestic and international distribution.

As *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* recently celebrated the 10-year anniversary of its founding, the current inquiry is a retrospective review of the scholarship published during that time period. This decade review is conceptualized as a means to encapsulate both the progress in the field and areas for needed growth. The relative dearth of peer-reviewed, research-based dissemination outlets makes such a review both imperative and timely. As underscored by Hunt, Joseph, and Nuzzi (2001), "In the 1960s, the *National Catholic Guidance Conference Journal* succeeded the *Catholic Counselor*. Both no longer exist. *The Catholic Educational Review*, the *Catholic School Journal*, *Notre Dame Journal of Education*, and the *Catholic Educator* also no longer exist" (p. i). Given that, *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* now carries an important mantle to disseminate educational research to teachers and administrators, parish and diocesan staff, and researchers and professors in academia.

## METHODOLOGY

This systematic review consists of all published articles from the inaugural issue (September 1997) through the 10th volume (June 2007). Using an SPSS database, each article was listed as a separate entry and several data fields were completed for the individual articles. The first major data fields concern demographics of article authors: (a) name of author(s); (b) gender; (c) affiliation; (d) occupational role; (e) religious or non-religious. The second set of data fields addresses the nature and scope of the published article

including (a) whether it is a standard research article, a review of research, a focus article, or a “response from the field;” (b) whether it has a domestic or international focus; and (c) whether it focuses on primary, secondary, or higher education. The third set of data fields centers on classifying whether the article used primarily quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methodology approaches. When possible, a specific research design/methodology is assigned (e.g., case study, survey, historical review, etc.). Last, through consultation with the managing editor, topical classifications (e.g., moral education, school choice, adolescence, etc.) were assigned to each article. Basic descriptive information was catalogued for each book review published in the 10 volumes of the *Journal*.

## FINDINGS

Descriptive information is provided across five domains: authorship, article type, article focus/scope, article methodology, and book reviews.

### AUTHORSHIP

Two hundred fifty-four individuals served as first (or sole) author on an article, review of research, or response from the field. Of those, 107 (42.1%) were women, 147 (57.9%) were men. Thirty-nine authors (15.4%) appeared as a first author on more than one occasion, with three individuals contributing as first author on five or more occasions. Forty-six (18.1%) of the authors were ordained or vowed religious. The 254 first authors in some cases may have contributed to other pieces of scholarship as a second, third, or fourth author, although that is not reported in this analysis. Finally, four selections not counted within the author total (254) appeared with corporate authorship in the *Journal*: (a) the *Pastoral Letter on the Christian Ecological Imperative* by the Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (2004); (b) *The Catholic School: On the Threshold of the Third Millennium* by the Congregation for Catholic Education (1998); (c) *Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium* by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (2006); and (d) *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools* by the Congregation for Catholic Education (2003). The *Journal* reprints such documents since their corporate authorship represents official Church teaching, albeit of varying degrees.

Table 1

*First Author Professional Affiliations*

Category	Frequency	Percent
Catholic university or college	131	51.6
School	30	11.8
Public university or college	29	11.4
Non-profit agency	20	7.9
Diocesan administrator	19	7.5
Private university or college	15	5.9
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops	7	2.8
Research organization	3	1.2
Total	254	100

*Note.* Percentages may total more than 100.0 due to rounding.

The professional affiliations of authors included higher education settings, schools, diocesan offices, research organizations, and non-profit agencies (see Table 1). Just over half (51.6%) of all first authors' professional affiliation was a Catholic university or college. Nearly 70% of authors were based at higher education settings in general (i.e., Catholic, public, and private). Notably, 11.8% of authors were professionals in school settings. Examining authors' roles within their primary affiliation setting provided a more refined glimpse into author characteristics. Table 2 presents frequency and percentage by author roles, which included university professors at all academic ranks, school administrators, diocesan leaders, teachers, non-profit agency directors, and graduate students. Full professors contributed nearly one out of every four articles in the *Journal*.

Table 2

*First Author Professional Role*

Category	Frequency	Percent
Professor	59	23.2
Assistant professor	37	14.6
Executive director	34	13.4
Associate professor	32	12.6
School administrator	29	11.4
Diocesan office	16	6.3
Teacher	11	4.3
Research associate/Fellow	11	4.3
Director	11	4.3
M.A. or Ph.D. student	10	3.9
Other	4	1.6
Total	254	100

*Note.* Percentages may total less than 100.0 due to rounding.

## ARTICLE TYPE

Several of the 254 authors discussed above contributed multiple articles to the *Journal*. In sum, across the 10 volumes, the *Journal* published 315 separate pieces of scholarship. Table 3 depicts the frequency of *Journal* submissions categorized as focus articles, research articles, reviews of research, and responses from the field.

Multiple articles organized within one issue around a distinct theme or topic comprise a focus section. Focus articles represented 41% of published material in the *Journal* and have delved into topic areas such as moral education, inclusion, alternative teacher education, liturgy in schools, special education, and Catholic secondary schools. General articles within a particular issue, typically ranging from 6,000-7,500 words, accounted for 39% of *Journal* content. Since the first issue, the *Journal* has included reviews of

research whose authors have synthesized various bodies of literature. The 36 reviews of research (11.4% of total content) have addressed wide-ranging topics: time of day effects on human performance (Hines, 2004), teacher recruitment and retention (O'Keefe, 2002), educators' spiritual formation (Earl, 2005), and the modern homeschooling movement (Ray, 2001). Based on suggestions from the *Journal* governing board, with the emergence of Volume 8 (2004-2005) a new article category appeared: responses from the field. These responses, although shorter in length than the standard research articles and focus pieces, represented an attempt to engage scholarly interaction and debate around particular subjects. Moreover, including the responses from the field was an explicit attempt to engage dialogue among researchers and practitioners. As a relatively new submission format, responses from the field have comprised 8.6% of total *Journal* content.

Table 3

*Article Type*

Category	Frequency	Percent
Focus article	129	41.0
Research article	123	39.0
Review of research	36	11.4
Responses from the field	27	8.6
Total	315	100

## ARTICLE FOCUS AND TOPIC

Twenty-eight articles (8.9%) had an explicitly international focus (e.g., Australia, Scotland, India, Transylvania), with the remainder concerned with domestic issues, samples, or not specifying a domestic/international lens. While the Appendix lists the sheer diversity of topic areas addressed by scholarship in the *Journal*, Table 4 lists the 10 most frequently addressed areas. Topics in higher education were addressed in just over 6% of all articles. An additional six articles focused on *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (John Paul II, 1990); if these are included within the higher education topic area, the percentage of total content devoted to higher education topics increases to 8.3%. General examples of this genre include an article on hiring practices at insti-

tutions of higher learning (Breslin, 2000) and a consideration of teaching at the university level as a profession or a vocation (Buijs, 2005). Along with higher education, Catholic identity, school choice, multicultural education, leadership, and private education were topics addressed on more than 10 occasions. Out of the entire spectrum of topics listed in the Appendix (75 total), the 10 most frequently occurring that are listed in Table 4 accounted for over one third (40.4%) of all material published in the *Journal*.

Table 4

*Topic Area*

Category	Frequency	Percent
Higher education	20	6.3
Catholic identity	14	4.4
School choice	13	4.1
Multicultural education	11	3.5
Leadership	11	3.5
Private education	11	3.5
Moral education	10	3.2
Secondary education	9	2.9
Special education	9	2.9
Biography	9	2.9
Total	117	37.2

## ARTICLE RESEARCH METHODS

The methodology and research design characteristics of each article were reviewed and classified according to the method descriptions presented in Table 5. The majority of *Journal* publications (61%) are best described as descriptive research or research reviews. Naturally, this figure includes every review of research since by definition those contributions were syntheses of extant research. Other articles in this category, however, include those that espouse a general narrative/essay format, outlining and describing a topic



area in a discursive, detailed, and/or purely descriptive manner. For example, Doyle (2004) outlined the importance of high quality data as a necessary and powerful component of the federal legislative process as they concern educational programs for children attending private schools. Contributions in this category can be largely theoretical, as evidenced by Bidwell and Dreeben's (2003) descriptive, sociological analysis of the private/public distinction in the organization of schools.

Table 5

*Methodological Approaches Utilized in Journal Articles*

Method Description	Frequency	Percent
Descriptive research/Research review	192	61.0
Historical review	34	10.8
Survey	26	8.3
Case study	17	5.4
Policy review	11	3.5
Interviews	11	3.5
Group comparison	9	2.9
Mixed method	8	2.5
Document/Text analysis	6	1.9
Focus groups	1	.3
Total	315	100

*Note.* Percentages may total more than 100.0 due to rounding.

Historical reviews appeared 34 times (10.8% of total content) and delved into areas such as the evolution of private schooling in the United States (Glenn, 1998) and Elizabeth Ann Seton's passion for education (McNeil, 2006). Survey methodology was employed in 26 articles (8.3%). Exemplars include Squillini's (2001) examination of job satisfaction characteristics that lead to longevity and commitment among Catholic elementary teachers; Watzke (2002) used an e-mail survey of department chairs and directors to examine practices within teacher education programs in Catholic colleges

and universities. Qualitative, case study approaches were used to glean in-depth insight into topics ranging from social change efforts at a Catholic inner-city school in India (Jessop, 2001) to a two-part series on third-grade teachers working in the sociocultural context of Hispanic border schools (Watt, 2002a, 2002b). Of the remaining methods—policy review, interview, group comparison, mixed methodology, document analysis, and focus group—each was used in less than 5% of *Journal* articles.

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

One hundred and forty book reviews were published in the first 10 volumes of the *Journal* by 128 authors. Nine authors contributed two or more book reviews. Only one issue (Volume 4, Number 4) did not publish any book reviews. In all other issues, there ranged between one to nine book reviews with an average of four per issue. Books reviewed were primarily education-related but drew widely from germane fields such as sociology, law, human development, psychology, liturgy, history, and theology. The sheer diversity of reviewed content reflects the editors' commitment to viewing schools and other Catholic educational entities as ecologically situated and deeply contextualized.

## **REFLECTIONS ON *JOURNAL* CONTENT**

With regard to authorship, the descriptive analyses revealed that over two thirds of *Journal* content was contributed by higher education-based authors. That finding should be examined in light of the *Journal's* mission statement to consider whether it upholds the mission as stated or calls for mission refinement. For example, with less than 5% of *Journal* content published by teachers, the *Journal* should consider whether it wishes to solicit more scholarship from practitioner researchers. There is a longstanding and growing movement to encourage the reflective engagement of teachers as experts in their own right, able to conduct systematic, action-oriented research in their own professional settings (Hendricks, 2006; Mertler, 2006; Nuzzi & Frabutt, 2007; Sagor, 2005). With the laicization of Catholic education in general, it is perhaps not surprising that nearly one fifth of all articles were authored by ordained or vowed religious. Issues to consider when reviewing the affiliations and roles of publishing authors include the manner of manuscript solicitation, direct outreach to authors, and issuing specific calls for authors that are school, agency, or parish-based.

Expanding the source of published research to include teacher researchers might also have an impact on subscriptions. Theoretical articles attract a particular demographic more suited to higher education and the pro-

fessoriate. Including studies of individual schools and classroom practices or programs, conducted by teachers, would appeal to a wider audience.

In regard to article type, there is a clear balance among the two major types of article categories, focus articles and general research articles (41% and 39%, respectively). There has been consistent commitment to review the knowledge base in various thematic areas as evidenced by the appearance of 36 reviews of research. Although new, the responses from the field format is a particularly useful and engaging manner to present scholarship as well as debate new and emerging ideas. Maintaining the responses from the field as a recurring fixture in the table of contents places value on the dialogic nature of a field's maturation, highlighting the interplay and contrast of divergent viewpoints.

The *Journal* has published scholarship on topics that span the Catholic educational research spectrum. Its pages have offered an outlet for research on topics as divergent as civic virtue, dance, and women's studies. The caveat must be mentioned that much research is often undertaken because of the nature of the financial support behind it. Financial support—through federal grants, foundation funding, and other sources—is, in turn, a barometer of the prevailing political climate. When the public policy arena is focused on a particular issue, it is likely that research funding soon follows, typically for studied inquiry into both sides of the argument.

In regard to research methodologies employed in *Journal* scholarship, a range of designs and approaches were observed, from case studies to survey designs to historical analysis. Taken as a whole, however, the majority of content in the first 10 issues of the *Journal* (61%) was largely descriptive. Such a finding is in line with the notion that when a field—Catholic education in this case—is young, it is largely descriptive. At such a stage, the primary objectives of the field's scholarship are to define parameters of the field; produce in-depth, descriptive reviews of content areas; and provide conceptual frameworks and models to guide future research. It would be expected that in the next 10 years, although descriptive research will continue to play a necessary role, other educational research methodologies will constitute an increasing percentage of Catholic education scholarship.

As the *Journal* moves forward, a model of scholarship outlined by Burkhardt and Schoenfeld (2003) may provide insight and guidance regarding a balanced approach to publishing educational research situated in Catholic schools. These authors described three approaches in the field of education more generally: (a) the humanities approach is geared toward gaining knowledge and understanding by generating new ideas and often manifests itself as critical commentary; (b) the science approach is focused on the analysis of phenomena, the building of models to explain and predict,

and then empirically testing those models; (c) the engineering approach centers on understanding phenomena in order to develop solutions to practical problems. The advisory board and editors would be wise to aim for a balance among these approaches. It appears that the *Journal* already does well to surface the humanities approach and offers some scholarship that fits the definition of the science approach. By engaging practitioners even more in practical, research-based methods to address challenges and opportunities in their schools, parishes, and campuses, the *Journal* will augment its repertoire of relevant, solutions-focused scholarship.

Any journal, however, can only offer for publication the best of what is received by way of manuscripts, both solicited and unsolicited. In calling for a deepening and a broadening of research approaches, no criticism of current editorial standards or advisory board policies is intended. Rather, this recommendation can serve to shape the research agenda of the membership of both the advisory board and the governing board, and help direct the supported research agenda of their respective, constitutive faculties. Thus, if the *Journal* can achieve a better balance among the approaches described as humanities, science, and engineering, it will only be the result of research ably conducted by many of the sponsoring institutions and their faculties and the broader participation of K-12 Catholic school teachers. This effort holds great potential, especially in its interdisciplinary appeal to attract and bring together thoughtful teachers and professors in fields such as psychology, sociology, law, and political science.

In 1992, Convey addressed the status of educational research regarding Catholic schools at the end of his work, *Catholic Schools Make A Difference*. Summarizing published research from the period 1975-1990, Convey noted that the majority of studies on Catholic schools employed descriptive approaches, comparative analyses, and included a survey methodology. Longitudinal studies, which follow the same group of students over a period of time, were few in Catholic education and remain so. Analytic priorities at that time included the need to measure the true relationship between salient variables under study and the validity of approaches based on these variables. More sophisticated statistical techniques and rigorous predictive and inferential approaches in the study of Catholic education were few, and although much has been accomplished in the area since 1992, much remains to be done.

## CONCLUSION

The Notre Dame Task Force on Catholic Education (2006) wrote that it is imperative to “build the field of Catholic education” (p. 9). To embark on such an endeavor, it is critical to focus first on history, paying respect and

homage to the past. It is often the case that institutions and leaders must maintain and extol connections to their historical forbears in order to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. In the same way, this article is offered as a means to foster historical memory of Catholic educational scholarship—both distant and recent past—in a way that celebrates Catholic identity.

Catholic education needs passionate leaders, but that leadership must be informed by accurate knowledge, scientific research, and mission-driven decision making. Efforts to advance the participation of teachers in research and the breadth of higher education's involvement in Catholic schools can serve to strengthen both the spiritual and academic trajectories of Catholic educational institutions.

As the *Journal* transitions to a new institutional home, Boston College ushers in a new period of stewardship for Catholic education. In the midst of that transition, the inquiry outlined here is a small but important step toward taking stock of the Catholic educational research knowledge base, confirming strengths, identifying areas of needed growth, and moving forward with renewed purpose. In this way, we celebrate Catholic educational research for its rich past, but look forward to its exciting future.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> The founding institutions agreed to share hosting responsibilities for the operation and editorship of the *Journal*, each providing 5 years of institutional support. The University of Dayton provided a sixth year of support before the *Journal's* transition in 2002 to the University of Notre Dame.

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## Appendix

Master List of Topic Areas Addressed through <i>Journal</i> Scholarship		
Adolescence	Inclusion	Religious Instruction
Australia	India	School Choice
Biography	Instruction	School Counseling
Catholic Identity	Ireland	School Leadership
Catholic Social Thought	Jesuit Education	Scotland
Civic Virtue	Lay Faculty	Scripture
Classroom Management	Leadership	Secondary Education
Consecrated Religious	Liberation Theology	Self-Esteem
Dance	Literature	Social Justice
Economics	Liturgy	Special Education
Education Law	Loneragan, Bernard	Spirituality
Education Reform	Marianist Education	Stress
Education Technology	Maritain, Jacques	Student Achievement
Elementary Education	Mentoring	Teachers
Emancipatory Education	Merton, Thomas	Teacher Education
England	Moral Education	Teacher Recruitment
<i>Ex Corde Ecclesiae</i>	Movies	Teacher Retention
Gay/Lesbian	Multicultural Education	Transylvania
General Research	Other Faith-Based Education	Unity
Governance	Parental Involvement	Urban Schools
Government Funding	Philosophy of Education	Vatican Documents
Higher Education	Private Education	Violence
History	Public Education	Virtual Schools
Homeschooling	Public Policy	Walt Disney
Hope	Reconciliation, Sacrament of	Women's Studies