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ARTICLES

The Impact of Catholic School Identity and Organizational Leadership on the Vitality of Catholic Elementary Schools

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In order to fulfill their role of teaching children to receive Jesus and live out his call to create the Kingdom of God on earth and in heaven, Catholic schools need to possess and foster the distinctive characteristics of Catholic school identity. This study examined the relationship between Catholic school identity and organizational leadership and the extent to which these predict aspects of school vitality in Catholic elementary schools. The results of the analyses point to the significant predictive relationship of Catholic school identity on each subscale of school vitality and at least one subscale of organizational leadership on three of the four subscales of school vitality. In addition, years of teaching in Catholic schools and percent of Catholic students are significant predictors of Catholic school identity.

The purpose of this research is to (1) examine the relationship between Catholic school identity and the organizational leadership of a Catholic elementary school and (2) determine the extent to which Catholic school identity and the school's organizational leadership predict aspects of school vitality. Catholic schools face the challenge of ensuring the Catholic identity of their schools as instructed by the documents of the Catholic Church (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1977, 1988). It may be advantageous to distinguish qualities of the school, especially those indicating the strength of Catholic school identity and the organizational leadership of a school. It may be further useful to determine the extent to which Catholic school identity and organizational leadership can predict overall school vitality that is defined as the ability of a school to develop as an effective institution in the realization of its educational mission (Fullan, 1982, 1991, 2005; Purkey & Smith, 1983).

The major question that this study addresses is the extent to which a school's Catholic school identity in conjunction with the leadership of the principal contributes to the vitality of a Catholic elementary school. School vitality, which constitutes the dependent variable for the study, includes measures of faculty mindfulness, collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and teacher affiliation. Organizational leadership is defined in the context of the leadership of the principal and includes a measure of principal mindfulness and the measures of organizational health in terms of institutional integrity, collegial leadership, and resource influence. Because teachers are so vital to the formation process of Catholic education, their views provide the data for this study of Catholic elementary schools. Teachers are those best suited to evaluate the climate of a school and the effectiveness of its leader.

Catholic School Identity

In addition to its academic purposes, the role of the Catholic school is to teach the students to receive Jesus and live out his call to create the Kingdom of God on earth (CCE, 1977). In order to execute its mission, the Church has specified the nature of Catholic education. In the pre-Vatican Church documents about Christian education, Pope Leo XIII (1879, 1885) declared that philosophy is the defense of faith and that Christian education is the union of scholarly instruction with faith and morals. In order to fulfill this role, Catholic schools need to possess those distinctive characteristics of Catholic school identity that the research has shown to be essential: strong spiritual leadership within a vibrant faith community (Convey, 1992; Schuttloffel, 1999, 2008). McCarron (1997) found that "Principals who have high leadership belief also have high leadership behavior and perceive a high level of manifestation of Catholic identity in their schools" (p. 199). Teachers in Catholic schools should prepare students to be critical thinkers and reflective individuals who engage knowledge and wisdom, understand their lives, make informed judgments, and form moral decisions (Groome, 1998).

Vatican documents set Catholic schools apart from other schools. "Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school" (CCE, 1977, p. 5). Within the community of a Catholic school, the faith of its members is nurtured and developed. This holistic view of faith development reflects the relational component of Catholic education and is integral to the concept of Catholic school identity as explored in the present study. Because of this communal aspect of the Catholic faith, teachers are affirmed in their roles as a significant part of the educational mission of the Church (CCE, 1982).

Groome (1998) proposed five distinct attributes of Catholic identity, or central theological characteristics of Catholic Christianity, and suggested three cardinal attributes, or substantial characteristics that permeate all five attributes of Catholicism. His distinct attributes of the Catholic faith are: the dignity of persons, goodness of creation, relationship and community, Scripture and tradition, and wisdom rationality. Groome's cardinal attributes are: spirituality, social justice, and universality. In a Catholic school, leadership trained in the Catholic faith is critical because the principal is the spiritual leader of the school and is responsible for the Catholic identity of his or her school in addition to fulfilling educational and managerial responsibilities (Ciriello, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c). Ciriello describes the identity of a Catholic school through a tripartite leadership model in which the principal functions as a spiritual, educational, and managerial leader in an integrated way. When all three functions are present and Catholic values permeate the organizational climate, the school fulfills its catechetical mission. One or more of Groome's characteristics can be associated to Ciriello's framework to operationalize the concept of Catholic school identity, namely spiritual and educational characteristics of faith development, building Christian community, moral and ethical development, history and philosophy, spiritual development, and religious instruction. According to Ciriello, the effective Catholic elementary school advances the faith of its faculty and students, supports their spiritual growth, and celebrates the Catholic faith. As a Christian community, the school collaborates with the parish, facilitates parent/school partnerships, and promotes the formation of a functional community (Convey, 1992). Effective Catholic schools integrate Gospel values and Christian ethics into the school. The history and philosophy of Catholic education form the basis for the Catholic elementary school's philosophy, mission, and vision statements. In addition, the effective Catholic school has a quality religious education program through the use of accepted catechetical and pedagogical methods and the integration of Christian ideals and Catholic teaching into the curriculum (Ciriello, 1998a). When a Catholic culture is created and the vision is communicated to the entire school community, the Catholic elementary school becomes a place of spiritual and personal growth for its teachers and students (CCE, 1977).

Organizational Leadership

Sergiovanni (2005) advances a concept of leadership in which leaders strengthen the heartbeat of their schools when they have faith in their cause, change hopefulness into reality, are trustworthy, and show love through servant leadership. Sergiovanni (1987) observes that a purely management concept of leadership is insufficient for effective leadership. He proposes a visionary and

cultural leadership that can be related to Ciriello's tripartite framework. In order to be an effective principal, the leader should be resilient in promoting the goals, educational program, and philosophy of the school (Sergiovanni, 1995). In addition, a leader should exhibit "a great deal of flexibility when concerned with the everyday articulation of these values into teaching and learning practices and designs" (p. 174).

This study utilizes Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp's (1991) and Parsons' (1958) institutional and managerial levels of school organizational health in assessing the effectiveness of the principal. The assessment utilizes teachers' perceptions about the ability of the principal to fulfill the mission of the school without external interference, obtain the resources needed to fulfill the teaching mission of the school, and promote collegial leadership to achieve the academic and religious mission of the school. Added to these three factors of organizational health is the factor of principal mindfulness, one in which a leader communicates relevant information that enables a leader to foresee and solve problems (Hoy, 2003; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001).

School Vitality

School vitality, a combination of student and teacher characteristics and behaviors, is the major outcome variable in this study. School vitality enables a Catholic elementary school to fulfill its educational mission despite difficult circumstances. In learning-enriched schools, shared school goals lead to effective teaching and collaboration, which, in turn, lead to increased levels of teacher commitment and effective student learning (Fullan, 1991). The perception of teachers about their collective efficacy affects their belief that they have the ability to plan and implement the instruction required to produce effective student learning (Bandura, 1997; Goddard, 2001). Taken together, these factors describe a school with vitality: one that is able to sustain its effectiveness as a community of learning through lasting improvement, capacity for long-term capability, and a supportive environment for adaptation to changing situations (Blankstein, 2004).

A school with vitality is one that is in a state of readiness for the unexpected by continual scanning, anticipating, containing, removing, and rebounding (Hoy, 2003; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Schools with expectations for effectiveness are ones in which teachers collectively are effective and individual teachers have confidence in their ability to achieve educational objectives (Bandura, 1997; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). The Catholic elementary school is able to fulfill its educational mission when teachers enjoy their affiliation with colleagues and students and academic success is promoted by teachers, parents, and students (Hoy et al., 1991). Added to the educational

level are the factors of faculty mindfulness, through which the faculty resiliently anticipates and solves problems, and collective efficacy, through which the faculty perceive themselves as capable in their educational situation.

Summary. The focus of the present study is on the relationships and processes at work in Catholic elementary schools as perceived by the teachers in these schools. A Catholic school should foster the common good, achieve social objectives, and form human persons; however, “its proper function is to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity” (Vatican Council II, 1965, p. 4). The inclusion of variables measuring Catholic school identity and school climate supports the purpose of this study to examine the Catholic elementary school from a perspective of organizational processes and relationships. Catholic school identity is one of the major variables in the present research, and, because of the emphasis on the climate of Catholic schools in Church documents, measures of school organizational climate are included. This connection between Catholic school identity and school climate is evidenced by the definition of school climate as “the set of internal characteristics that distinguishes one school from another and influences the behavior of people in it” (Hoy & Miskel, 1978, p. 185). The five components of elementary school health, as proposed by Hoy et al. (1991), have been separated in this research into three factors of organizational leadership that are demonstrated by management and two factors of school vitality that are demonstrated by teachers and students.

These theories of educational change, sustainability, effectiveness, mindfulness, and efficacy can be used to explain the processes of an organization and relate to Ciriello’s (1998a, 1998b, 1998c) tripartite leadership framework and Hoy et al.’s (1991) concept of organizational health. Hoy’s (2003) construct of school mindfulness and Goddard’s (2001) construct of collective efficacy are used to complete the set of variables examined in this study. This study is unique in that the collection of variables have not previously been combined and researched in the same way in either public or Catholic schools.

Methodology

Sample

The participants for this study were 1,225 teachers from 142 Catholic elementary schools in the United States. Two hundred forty-four schools were initially selected in two stages from the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) list of 6,163 Catholic elementary schools in this country for the

2007-2008 school year using a random sample, stratified according to NCEA regions. Urban, suburban, and rural schools from each of the 12 NCEA regions were randomly selected in proportion to the total number of schools in that region. Teachers from 58% of the schools returned a completed survey.

Instrumentation

The 29-item instrument created to measure Catholic school identity was named the Catholic School Identity Inventory. Initially, 69 items based on Ciriello's framework for Catholic school leadership were developed and pilot tested with 88 teachers in six Catholic elementary schools. Following an item analysis the scale was reduced to 29 items that had an internal consistency reliability with a coefficient alpha of .93. Six items were taken intact from McCarron's (1997) survey for Catholic high school principals and seven items from McCarron's survey were reworded. The remaining 16 items were new. A 4-step Likert scale with responses of rarely occurs, sometimes occurs, often occurs, and very frequently occurs was used in the survey. The Catholic identity survey items focus on specific qualities of Catholic schools, such as faith formation, catechetical development, religious practices and behaviors, and mission.

The 30-item instrument that measured organizational leadership was composed of items from the Organizational Health Inventory (Hoy et al., 1991) and the Principal Mindfulness Scale (Hoy & Miskel, 2004). The factors used from the Organization Health Inventory were institutional integrity (6 items, $\alpha = .90$), collegial leadership (10 items, $\alpha = .95$), and resource influence (7 items, $\alpha = .89$). These 23 items used a 4-step Likert scale with responses of rarely occurs, sometimes occurs, often occurs, and very frequently occurs. The Principal Mindfulness Scale (Hoy & Miskel, 2004) consists of seven items and used a 6-step Likert scale with responses from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The reliability coefficient for the Principal Mindfulness Scale was .91. These survey items focus on external demands, the personal and professional relationship between the principal and teachers, the availability of adequate and supplemental materials, the influence of the principal with superiors, the negotiation of crisis, and trust in expertise.

The 33-item instrument that measured school vitality was formed by scales from three different instruments. The educational aspect of school vitality was measured by two factors from the Organizational Health Inventory (Hoy, et al., 1991): teacher affiliation (8 items, $\alpha = .94$) and academic emphasis (6 items, $\alpha = .87$), using a 4-step Likert scale with responses of rarely occurs, sometimes occurs, often occurs, and very frequently occurs. The school

organizational feature of school vitality was measured by the seven items of the Faculty Mindfulness Scale (Hoy & Miskel, 2004). A 6-step Likert scale with responses that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used. The reliability coefficient of the Faculty Mindfulness Scale was .83. The teacher efficacy feature of school vitality was measured by the 12 items of the shortened form ($\alpha = .94$) of the Collective Efficacy Scale (Goddard, 2002). A 6-step Likert scale with responses that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used. These survey items focus on the relationship of the teachers with one another, the school, and the students; the emphasis on academics and student motivation; the ability of the teachers to persist through challenges and change; reliance on knowledge; the confidence of teachers that they can succeed; and community and family assets.

Analysis

The school, not the teacher, was used as the unit of analysis, so the data analyses were performed on the school means. Means for the variables of Catholic school identity, institutional integrity, collegial leadership, resource influence, principal mindfulness, teacher affiliation, academic emphasis, teacher mindfulness, and collective efficacy were computed for each teacher and then averaged within each school. In addition, demographic data were gathered regarding the school's location (urban, rural, or suburban) and its enrollment, whether the principal was a vowed religious, the percentage of Catholic teachers and Catholic students in the school, and the number of years each teacher had taught in a Catholic school.

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to examine patterns among the variables and their relationships. Multiple regression analyses were employed to examine the predictive relationships of Catholic school identity and organization leadership with school vitality. The four subscales of school vitality constituted the dependent variables in the analyses and the predictors were Catholic school identity and the four subscales of organizational leadership. An additional regression analysis was conducted with Catholic school identity as the dependent variable and the demographic variables of presence of a vowed religious principal, percent of Catholic students and teachers, and years of experience teaching in a Catholic school as predictors. In addition, a canonical correlation analysis was conducted to analyze the overall relationship between the five predictor variables on the four subscales of school vitality. Finally, a series of one-way analyses of variance were calculated to determine if differences occurred by location of the school (urban, suburban, rural) on the measures of Catholic school identity, organizational leadership, and school vitality.

Results

The researchers decided that data from four schools with less than three teacher responses were not included in the school analysis. The resulting sample size for school analysis was 138 schools, which is a sufficient sample size to detect a medium effect using a regression model with five predictors (Field, 2005). Almost half of the schools in the sample were classified as suburban (46%), followed by urban at about a third (36%) and rural at less than a fifth (18%). Almost half of the schools in the sample had 100 to 250 students (49.3%), and slightly less than a third had an enrollment of 251 to 450 students (29.7%). Schools with enrollment of less than 100 students and more than 450 students (8.7% and 12.3%, respectively) together made up a little over one-fifth of the sample. The largest group of schools in the sample were suburban schools with enrollments between 100 and 250 students.

Correlations among the Variables

The relationships between Catholic school identity and the subscales of organizational leadership were examined by the Pearson product-moment correlations. As anticipated, Catholic school identity was significantly correlated with all four subscales of organizational leadership: principal mindfulness ($r = .52$), institutional integrity ($r = .32$), collegial leadership ($r = .61$), and resource influence ($r = .59$). The correlations among the factors of organizational leadership ranged from .29 (institutional integrity with resource influence) to .89 (principal mindfulness with collegial leadership). Conceptually, the very high correlation between principal mindfulness and collegial leadership makes sense because collegial leadership consists of goal consensus, support, and concern for teachers (Hoy et al., 1991); however, this high correlation indicates a serious level of multicollinearity among these measures and raises questions about the distinctiveness of the two constructs. Catholic school identity also had statistically significant correlations with the four factors of school vitality: teacher affiliation ($r = .53$), academic emphasis ($r = .47$), faculty mindfulness ($r = .50$), and collective efficacy ($r = .47$). The correlations among the factors of school vitality ranged from .38 (academic emphasis with faculty mindfulness) to .89 (teacher affiliation with faculty mindfulness). These substantial correlations were anticipated and point to the one-dimensional nature of the school vitality construct.

Multiple Regression Results

Table 1 shows the results of the four separate multiple regressions to determine the predictive strength of Catholic school identity and the subscales of

Table 1

Summary of Regression Results for Subscales of School Vitality

Predictors	Teacher Affiliation		Academic Emphasis		Faculty Mindfulness		Collective Efficacy	
	β	Sig.	Beta	Sig.	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Institutional Integrity	.126	.090	.003	.972	.226	.002	-.019	.818
Collegial Leadership	-.156	.333	.331	.073	-.167	.283	-.096	.602
Resource Influence	.111	.201	.140	.157	.051	.543	.186	.063
Principal Mindfulness	.464	.002	-.360	.038	.519	.001	.190	.272
Catholic School Identity	.277	.002	.378	.000	.231	.008	.325	.002
R^2	.433		.263		.473		.259	

organizational leadership on the subscales of school vitality. The five predictor models explained from 25.9% of the variance for collective efficacy to 47.3% of the variance for faculty mindfulness. An important finding in this study is that Catholic school identity adds significantly to the prediction of the subscales of school vitality when added to a model that contains the organization leadership subscales. The significance of Catholic school identity is even more striking since it is maintained despite the presence of moderately high levels of multicollinearity between it and the subscales of organizational leadership, as evidenced in the magnitude of the correlations among the predictors. When added to organizational leadership, Catholic school identity is a significant predictor of every factor of school vitality and the only significant predictor of the subscale collective efficacy. These noteworthy findings were anticipated because Catholic characteristics should permeate all aspects of a Catholic school. The emergence of the Catholic characteristics of a school as an important predictor supports the premise that the spiritual purpose is integral to the educational and managerial purposes of a Catholic school.

The principal mindfulness subscale of organizational leadership emerged as a significant predictor of three of the subscales of school vitality: faculty mindfulness ($\beta = .519, p < .001$), teacher affiliation ($\beta = .464, p = .002$), and academic emphasis ($\beta = -.360, p = .038$), and, except for academic emphasis, a stronger predictor of these than Catholic school identity. Despite the very high correlation of principal mindfulness and collegial leadership, the former dominates the latter in the regression models.

Canonical Correlation

A canonical correlation describes the relationship between a linear combination of the predictor variables (Catholic school identity and subscales of organization leadership) and a linear combination of the subscales of school vitality. In that sense, it takes advantage of all of the information provided by the data, whereas a multiple regression treats each subscale of school vitality separately to determine how the predictors relate to it. The canonical correlation explains 48.5% of the variance of the linear combination of the four subscales of school vitality.

Table 2 shows the standardized weights for the predictor subscales and the school vitality subscales. The standardized weight for principal mindfulness (.630) dominates the set of predictor variables, followed by Catholic school identity (.411), and institutional integrity (.270). Faculty mindfulness dominates the dependent variable set with a standardized weight of .692, followed by teacher affiliation (.253), and academic emphasis (.122). While it was expected that aspects of organizational leadership would relate to school vitality, it was reassuring that Catholic school identity also contributed significantly to school vitality. These results confirm the importance of Catholic school identity and leadership to the vitality of a Catholic elementary school.

Other Analyses

Table 3 shows the results of the regression analysis using the demographic variables as predictors of Catholic school identity. The demographic factors accounted for 12.5% of the variability in Catholic school identity. The percentage of Catholic students ($p = .026$) and years of teaching in Catholic schools ($p = .022$) were significant predictors of Catholic school identity; however, neither the percentage of Catholic teachers in the school nor the presence of a vowed religious as principal had a significant impact on the teachers' assessment of the Catholic school identity of their schools.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the means for Catholic school identity and the subscales of organizational leadership by the location of the school did not yield significant results. An ANOVA conducted on the subscales of school vitality by location, however, showed that only one subscale, collective efficacy, was influenced by the location of the school ($F = 5.32, p = .006$), with teachers in urban schools having a significantly lower mean score on collective efficacy than teachers in rural and suburban schools. Since this variable measured the perception of the teachers to be effective, teachers in urban schools apparently felt they experienced more challenges in their teaching than did teachers in other schools.

Table 2
Standardized Weights for Canonical Correlation

Components	Standardized Weights
Predictor Variables	
Catholic School Identity	.411
Institutional Integrity	.270
Collegial Leadership	-.169
Resource Influence	.124
Principal Mindfulness	.630
Dependent Variables	
Teacher Affiliation	.253
Academic Emphasis	.122
Faculty Mindfulness	.692
Collective Efficacy	.031
R_c^2	.485

Table 3
Summary of Regression Results for Catholic School Identity

Predictors	β	Sig.
Presence of Vowed Principal	.134	.120
Percentage of Catholic Teachers	.000	.997
Percentage of Catholic Students	.200	.026
Years Teaching in Catholic Schools	.200	.022
R^2	.125	

Discussion of Findings

The major finding of this research is the predictive relationship of both Catholic school identity and healthy, mindful leadership on school vitality. Teachers who perceive that their schools had strong Catholic school identity and a principal who safeguards the school’s mission, supports the teachers, obtains needed resources, and seeks information also saw their schools as having a high level of vitality as measured by the teachers’ positive relationships, the students’ cooperation in learning, potential to recover from the unforeseen, and the teachers’ ability to function effectively. The teachers in this study also perceived that a school with good leadership also had strong Catholic school identity. Even when taking the various facets of organizational leadership variables into account, a key finding of the study is that Catholic

school identity significantly adds to the prediction of the vitality of a Catholic elementary school.

An important outcome of this research is that Catholic school identity as defined in this study is related to each of the four factors used to measure organizational leadership. The association between the ability of a principal to obtain resources and the demonstration of Catholic norms reinforces the Catholic Church's directive to principals about exercising Catholic stewardship in the management of financial resources. The significant relationship of Catholic school identity to principal mindfulness illustrates a principal who fosters Catholic rational thinking and is open to new information and points of view. According to this finding, teachers feel that principals who promote wisdom and unite the theoretical with everyday living also foster Catholic qualities.

A principal who relies on beliefs and safeguards the purposes of the school fosters the support of teachers in their commitment to the school. Teachers who perceive that their principals are free of unreasonable external pressure and acquire support for the mission of the school also feel that the teachers in their schools are able to recover from problems and deal with change. In addition, schools in which the teachers think their principals exhibit friendliness, consider the teachers' welfare, and set clear expectations have a positive emphasis on students' attitudes, cooperation, and motivation about learning.

Principals who obtain and utilize school resources effectively are associated with the following factors of school vitality: positive involvement of teachers, a studious environment, and faculty competency. This aspect of school leadership enhances the sense of dedication the teachers feel to their school and influences the value students place on their studies. According to the perceptions of teachers, when a principal is sensitive to the school's daily performance, demonstrates flexibility, and relies on expertise, the commitment of teachers to their school and trusting relationships are encouraged. These behaviors of principals can also foster an environment in which the students are focused on learning (Bennett, Elliott, & Peters, 2005). If a principal is an effective leader who promotes collegial relationships with the teachers and is communicative and consultative, the teachers are able to persist through difficulties and adapt to change.

The canonical correlation analysis provides additional support for the above findings, particularly for the enduring strength of the Catholic school identity variable. Catholic school identity along with principal mindfulness constituted the major components of the linear combination of predictors. The finding that Catholic school identity is an important predictor of school vitality is striking because it remains strong despite the natural relationship

that exists between principal mindfulness in the predictor set and faculty mindfulness in the dependent variable set.

The canonical analysis further reinforces the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the skill of the principal to deal expertly with the unexpected, the support of Catholic identity, and the attainment of the institutional mission and those characteristics of a school that teachers perceive are connected with school vitality. The mission of Catholic schools is related to the perception of the teachers on how often the attributes of Catholic school identity occur in their school, the fulfillment of its mission, a respectful relationship with the principal, the availability of resources, and the principal's ability to solve problems. In addition, these factors, taken together, demonstrate a predictive relationship with the teachers' perceptions of their caring relationships, ability to improve, and effective instruction as well as the students' focus on learning. This result is important because the purpose of Catholic schools is to excel in both religious and academic education in order to advance as educational institutions that exhibit school vitality.

The percentage of Catholic students and years of experience teaching in Catholic schools both emerged as significant predictors of Catholic school identity. These results should be interpreted with caution, however, because there may be other variables or combinations of variables that influenced the outcome. It would seem that a predominantly Catholic student body and a faculty experienced in Catholic school education would have some influence on the Catholic features of a school, although these may not be the only factors.

Teachers in urban, suburban, and rural schools differed in their perceptions of their ability to be effective, with those in urban schools having a lower sense of efficacy than those in suburban and rural schools. Perhaps teachers in urban schools more than those from other schools felt they experience more difficulties in their teaching, given the home and community environments from which their students come. Caution must be given to the soundness of these findings, however, because only a few schools were rural locations. Because of the limitations in this study, these demographic findings are of interest but need to be explored through further study.

Limitations of the Study

Even though obtaining data through surveys is an established research technique, it relies on self-report data from teachers who may have biases about their own schools or who gave politically correct, expected answers. Even though these general limitations of survey data could be applicable to this study, techniques, such as the use of previously researched measures, teachers' awareness that responses would be aggregated and used to investigate

schools as a group, reverse-scored items, and anonymity of the teachers, were used to minimize some of these limitations. Other limitations are specific to this study. The stratified random sample of Catholic elementary schools used in this survey was based on location of the schools by region of the country without consideration of size. Furthermore, although a response rate of 58% is considered good for this type of survey research, the extent to which teachers in responding schools have the same perceptions that teachers in nonresponding schools would have is not known. Finally, the concept of mindfulness, separated into principal mindfulness and faculty mindfulness, was used in both the predictor variable and dependent variable set, thus creating some common variance between the two variables that could influence the results of the regression analyses. These particular limitations could be addressed in future research.

Implications for Practice

Catholic leaders and other members of the Catholic school community must be challenged to ensure that the Catholic school identity of their schools is present, maintained, and enhanced for the very vitality of the school. The Catholic School Identity Inventory developed for this study provides a tool to evaluate teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of their school's religious and educational purposes and the collegial relationships within the school. Diocesan leaders could use this survey to assess their schools for the occurrence of Catholic distinctiveness, the qualities of principals, and the characteristics of vitality. The information from this study would enable diocesan chancellors and superintendents to approach the evaluation of Catholic schools in a more holistic way rather than simply examining finances and enrollment trends. The data from the teacher surveys would point to areas of weakness that could be improved and areas of strength that could be built upon. In this way, the quality of Catholic schools would be maintained and advanced.

Because the data from this study suggest that the number of years teachers work in Catholic schools may affect the teachers' perception of their school's Catholic school identity, teacher retention must be a goal of all Catholic leaders. Findings from the present study also imply that schools and dioceses should focus on the Catholic school identity of schools that do not have a high percentage of Catholic students enrolled. Since this research provides a solid argument for the importance of Catholic school identity to organizational leadership and school vitality, the ongoing religious development of teachers and principals is essential (Schuttloffel, 2003; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). In addition, Catholic leaders should provide

professional development that focuses on the integration of faith into the entire curriculum. Diocesan chancellors and school superintendents could use the information from the survey used in this study to examine the qualities of Catholic school principals and to sustain school principals in their responsibility of maintaining the Catholic characteristics of their schools.

In order to assist teachers to develop the competencies in the variables that were measured by this study and in so doing contribute to the vitality of a school, professional development in these areas should be provided by schools and the diocese. If teachers applied this training to building relationships and increase their commitment to the mission of the school, the results of this study suggest that the teachers' connection to one another and their school would be strengthened. Educators should also be trained to be critical thinkers and reflectors who make knowledgeable judgments, as well being able to address the unforeseen. In addition, teachers should be provided experiences that will foster their ability to teach and motivate students to focus on academics because teachers who perceive themselves as successful believe that they are capable of managing and implementing productive learning strategies. Diocesan and local leaders might network with nearby Catholic colleges and universities in order to provide programs that will enhance the teachers' ability to be effective. These types of programs can assist the principals and teachers in developing the characteristics of school vitality as defined in this study.

The diocesan school office, assisted by local Catholic universities when possible, also needs to provide for the formation of Catholic school principals in four specific ways that improve their ability to lead. The first is in mission implementation. Catholic school principals should understand the Catholic mission of their schools and have the capacity to implement that mission with both external and internal support. The second is in collegial techniques that enable the principals to plan for goal achievement in academics and high performance in instruction and to develop friendly, caring relationships with their teachers. The third is to develop the skill of being open to varying perspectives and responses in order to resolve crises. Finally, the diocesan bishop, chancellor, and school superintendent need to work together to develop resources for the elementary school principals. In these ways, schools would fulfill the dual function of Catholic schools, religious and academic, as described in Church documents (CCE, 1977, 1988).

Conclusion

According to this research, Catholic elementary school teachers perceive that schools with a strong Catholic school identity and a respectful, mission-

focused, influential, alert principal promotes the ability of the teachers to be connected, flexible, and effective and encourages the students to value learning. The findings about the significance of the relationships among the factors depict a school in which the principal is watchful, collaborative, focused on mission, and able to obtain resources and that has teachers with strong collegial relationships who are proficient, adaptable to change, and focused on academics. In addition, this school is one in which the Catholic faith, morals, and practices are evident. The findings support the value of utilizing the concepts of Catholic school identity, organizational leadership, and school vitality to examine a Catholic elementary school and can be applied to Catholic schools in order to ensure that the teaching mission of the Catholic Church continues to be accomplished in these schools.

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