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# When Did It Begin? Catholic and Public School Classroom Commonalities

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## Catholic and Public School Classroom Commonalities: A Historical Perspective

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*Catholic educational historians have noted that although preserving Catholic identity has been a constant in the mission of Catholic schools, their curriculum and instructional practices have evolved in ways similar to that of public schools, enabling Catholic parents to select schools that are both faith based and modern. Because there is an absence of information about when and how this change in Catholic education began, this article documents its origin in the 1940s, when Catholic educators joined a public school reform movement called life adjustment education. Once that effort began, there was no turning back, and Catholic educators participated in the major reforms of the next two decades: discipline-centered curriculum reform and humanistic education. The following essay presents two case studies to illustrate what reform-based Catholic schools were like in the 1970s, then presents a brief analysis of Catholic school participation in the contemporary Common Core State Standards movement.*

### Keywords

Catholic identity, mission, life adjustment education, education reform

Research on Catholic schools has indicated that qualities that reflect a school's Catholic identity are more responsible for the academic excellence the school achieves than its curriculum choices or instructional orientation (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). This finding partially explains the evolution of Catholic school curriculum and instruction in ways that are similar to that of schools in the public sector. If preserving and enhancing Catholic identity is the more critical factor, following the lead of other educators regarding content and pedagogy was and remains a reasonable decision (Ozar, 2012a).

Certain historical factors account for Catholic and public school classroom commonalities. The introduction in the most recent history of Catholic education, *Urban Catholic Education: Tales of Twelve American Cities*, stated that the success of Catholic schools in those cities

was assured by the willingness of Catholic educators over many generations to change and revise the parochial school curriculum in response

to changes in the public school curriculum and the desires and aspirations of Catholic parents. Catholic educators realized that a rigid, doctrinaire curriculum would force Catholic parents to choose between their religious faith and their children's future. By incorporating many of the elements of public schooling into the parish school curriculum, Catholic educators promised to secure both the Faith and the future of her children. (Hunt & Walch, 2010, p. 3)

Browsing issues of *Momentum* and *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* confirms this view. However, except for two paragraphs in the first chapter of *Urban Catholic Education*, no information documents the emergence of Catholic and public school curriculum and instructional commonalities—or when and where they began. Whereas the word “parochial” refers to parish elementary schools, this new history devotes significant space to Catholic secondary schools in which classroom commonalities often appear, making the omission of supporting data even more surprising. To remedy this lack of information, I will discuss a specific post–World War II educational development that fostered connections between Catholic and public school educators and spurred the development of a more common view of curriculum and instruction that has since remained. The specific catalyst that brought those educators together was the short-lived and much-maligned reform effort called life adjustment education, a reform that participants believed was part of the progressive education movement.

### **Life Adjustment Education: The Progressive Education Background**

The goals of late 19th- and early 20th-century progressive education were shaped by John Dewey, a philosopher and educator who believed that the road to educational mastery was built by teachers who developed creative activities that took advantage of student interests nurtured by environments with which they were familiar. These group activities would stimulate natural thought processes that led to the acquisition of traditional subject matter and simultaneously promote the social and cooperative skills necessary to maintaining our democratic civic culture (Dworkin, 1967). Dewey's basic idea was more readily accepted in the world of educational practice due to the influence of his protégé and then-colleague at Columbia University, William Heard Kilpatrick, whose well-known 1918 essay labeled Dewey's key concept the “project method,” and included a template for its use by teachers. Kilpat-

rick's acceptance of Dewey's beliefs was obvious, but his animosity to subject matter "set in advance," and his increased emphasis on student interests were the beginning of lowered expectations for traditional intellectual outcomes when applying Dewey's principles in schools (Bagley, 1938). Dewey's writing was dense, and his lectures low key and boring, whereas Kilpatrick's were the opposite, making him the premier popularizer of Dewey's idea—even as he inadvertently altered the more nuanced components of them (Beineke, 1998). Although Dewey's views were more directly related to elementary education, his emphasis on student interest was part of a movement that ultimately contributed to an increased focus on utilitarian secondary educational goals for students. Functional curriculum and instructional models were subsequently developed and widely circulated, and because they eschewed the exclusive focus on traditional subjects prevalent in the 19th century, they were seen as progressive by those who created and sought to implement them.

The most notable early statement of a student-needs-based curriculum was the National Education Association's (NEA) 1918 Cardinal Principles report, which delineated the following objectives for secondary education: (a) health, (b) the command of fundamental processes (the 3 Rs), (c) worthy home membership, (d) vocation, (e) citizenship, (f) worthy use of leisure, and (g) ethical character. The absence of any concern for academic subjects in that list was stunning (Ravitch, 2000). A variety of similar reports emerged over the next 25 years, mostly tweaking the basic ideas set forth in the Cardinal Principles document, and culminating with the publication of *Education for ALL American Youth* in 1944 by the NEA's Educational Policies Commission. That document listed 10 "imperative needs of youth," which was a slightly longer version of the list developed in 1918 (Tanner & Tanner, 1990). This decree was part of a continuing and drastic change in the long history of the American school curriculum, but was acceptable because it seemed to blend Deweyan child-centered theorizing with the common sense notion that curriculum should meet the individual needs of all students (Kliebard, 1986). As one historian noted, by the 1940s, this hybrid form of progressivism had become the conventional educational wisdom of the day (Cremin, 1988). What came next, however—life adjustment education—seemed so extreme that it substantially diminished the influence of progressive education, making it an object of ridicule.

### A Brief History of Life Adjustment Education, 1945–1953

The story of life adjustment education has been well covered by those who write the history of education and curriculum, and by a lengthy and comprehensive study of this educational reform movement by Dorothy Broder (1976), which is usually the source of the shorter descriptions found in more general texts. The main significance of life adjustment education is that it represents the end-stage of early 20th-century functional curriculum, and because its excesses enabled those in favor of a more academic curriculum to make a comeback as the second half of the century began.

The life adjustment education movement began in 1945 with a resolution by the prominent vocational educational leader Charles Prosser at a national vocational education conference. The essence of Prosser's resolution was that conferences should be held to develop educational programs to fit the needs of the 60% of students in junior and senior high schools that do not go to college or enter skilled professions after graduation (Federal Security Agency, 1948). John Studebaker, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, was a long-time opponent of the traditional secondary curriculum and threw his support behind the life adjustment idea. Several regional conferences were held in 1946 to delineate what the components of the new functional curriculum would be, and then a national conference took place in Chicago in 1947 to develop action plans to promote the use of that curriculum. The Chicago conference also called for the creation of a National Commission on Life Adjustment Education for Youth, and, under the direction of the U.S. Office of Education, that commission was created for a term of three years, beginning in 1948. The commission consisted of nine members representing major educational organizations, and was supported by staff members of the Office of Education. The commission formulated a definition of life adjustment education that was subsequently used by most people associated with this movement:

Life adjustment education is designed to equip all American youth to live democratically with satisfaction to themselves and profit to society as home members, workers and citizens. It is concerned especially with a sizeable proportion of youth of high school age (both in school and out) whose objectives are less well served by our schools than the objectives of preparation for either a skilled occupation or higher education. (Federal Security Agency, 1951, p. 36)

As the definition indicates, the goal of life adjustment education had increased from the original “neglected 60%” of students to “all American youth.”

From the beginning of the First Life Adjustment Commission in 1948 to the end of the Second Commission in 1953, staff members of the U.S. Office of Education mounted a campaign to arouse and sustain support for life adjustment education. They gave speeches before educational organizations of all sorts, wrote articles and book chapters, served as consultants to state education departments through whom the federal office worked to maintain support for the movement, and produced documents that summarized and publicized life adjustment activities. From the time of Prosser’s resolution in 1945 until the expiration of the Second Life Adjustment Commission in 1953, the Office of Education, though stretched thin and underfinanced, continued to promote curriculum development related to helping students become successful family members, productive workers, and competent citizens (Broder, 1976).

What were the essential features of life adjustment curriculum and the instructional approaches needed to implement it? Of course, schools that followed life adjustment recommendations did not import all the suggested components, and they modified others according to their needs and their past practices. Nevertheless, several life adjustment characteristics stand out. One was the shift from the specific vocational training in place since the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 to a more generalized form of that training. As stated in the first national life adjustment publication (Federal Security Agency, 1948), “Life adjustment is impossible unless occupational adjustment occurs” (p. 97). The chief result of this belief was an increased emphasis on the development of business education courses (Boynton, 1953), and specialized courses with titles like “The Problems of Making a Living” and “How to Get a Job and Hold It” (Allingham, 1952, p. 345; Federal Security Agency, 1951, p. 91). An additional result was the enthusiastic endorsement of school-work programs (Jordan & Spencer, 1953).

Another component of life adjustment curriculum was a “common learnings” course, often taught at the junior high school level. It was a core course that typically combined one course from English and one from social studies, with the purpose of instilling into students the citizenship goals of life adjustment education. The course emphasized human relations, group building activities, personal problems in a social setting, and knowledge of and participation in community affairs (Federal Security Agency, 1951; Michael, 1952).

Life adjustment education sought to prepare workers to live appropriately as citizens, workers, and family members—the last of which also made claims for a more honored space in the curriculum. Home economics in general and specific courses in family living were major beneficiaries of life adjustment. The argument was that well-run families were a basis for the success of individuals and their subsequent contributions to the community; families were also a training ground for developing the values needed in a democratic society (Albert, 1953; Rose, 1950).

Home economics, business education, and common learnings were the most visible of the curriculum changes accomplished by life adjustment educators, but these proponents also believed that all traditional subject matter could be taught from a life adjustment perspective. Life adjustment curriculum in any subject was always very detailed and primarily concerned with the social utility of the subject. In the 1920s, one of the founders of this type of curriculum, Franklin Bobbit, wrote that education should “prepare for the fifty years of adulthood, not for the twenty years of childhood and youth” (Tanner & Tanner, 1990, p. 189). Accordingly, classroom instructional practices should be activities that provide direct experiences to prepare students for the future.

In addition, activities usually considered extracurricular should become part of standard curriculum (Zeran, 1953). Contemporary critics of life adjustment education, of whom the historian Arthur Bestor (1953) was the most well known, condemned the replacement of traditional curriculum with material they believed was trivial and self-evident. The work of scholars and teachers who enhanced and transmitted traditional disciplines was being replaced by a curriculum and instructional system that favored topics related to basic living delivered through activities and projects—a development Bestor (1953) dubbed “regressive education.”

### **Catholic Educators Endorse Life Adjustment Education**

Given the history of Catholic schools in the United States and the institutional issues affecting Catholic education in the 1940s and 1950s, how was it possible that some Catholic educators developed connections to the life adjustment movement? The most important issue at that time was the substantial expansion of Catholic schools that forced religious orders to send novice sisters who had little college experience and no teacher training to teach. Moreover, the Church and its schools valued tradition more than experimentation, and certainly did not believe that children and youth should

have control over what they should value and learn. Why did Catholic educators participate in the life adjustment movement with its considerably different belief system?

To begin, a Catholic educator named Father Bernardine Myers, president of the Secondary School Department of the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), was among the nine organizational representatives appointed to the First Life Adjustment Commission. Fr. Myers became a publicist for life adjustment education. His February 1948 article in the *National Catholic Education Bulletin* informed Catholic educators of the commission's existence and his belief in the appropriateness of its objectives. He also commented on his appointment to the commission:

The U.S. Office of Education is keenly aware of the magnitude of the contribution of Catholic education to the nation. We have not been left out in regard to the deliberations connected with this entire program. We have a representative on the National Commission who was most graciously and respectfully received into this group of notable educators. (Myers, 1948, p. 33)

After announcing that the main topic of the 1948 NCEA meeting would be life adjustment education, Myers (1948) suggested a perspective that enabled Catholics to discuss that topic:

Maybe we have been and still are a bit on the conservative side. True, we are always educating with eternal salvation in mind, but it must not be forgotten that a well adjusted life in the world can be a most important factor in winning a blessed eternity. (p. 30)

At the NCEA conference that year, multiple laudatory papers were presented on a variety of typical life adjustment curriculum topics, one of which was by Father Anselm Townsend (1948), a colleague of Fr. Myers at Fenwick High School in Oak Park, Illinois. Townsend (1948) asserted that the Prosser Resolution forced Catholics to reexamine their secondary system, which has been to a large degree "on the wrong track" (p. 197). Catholics, he argued, need more terminal rather than college preparatory high schools in order to enable students to achieve fitness for life. In 1948, Townsend's paper was subsequently published in the *Catholic School Journal*, where it would be more accessible for other Catholic educators.



Fr. Myers died in 1948, and his replacement on the Life Adjustment Commission was Sister Mary Janet Miller. Sr. Mary Janet had been principal of Cathedral High School in Denver before her appointment to the Catholic University-based Commission on American Citizenship. As a member of that commission, she was already affiliated with the one Catholic educational organization that articulated concern for the development of social and civic competence in Catholic school children. That organization, the Commission on American Citizenship, was established at Catholic University in 1938 in response to an instruction from Pope Pius XI to draw up “a constructive social program of education based on Christian principles” (Buetow, 1970, p. 231). Under the leadership of Monsignor George Johnson, a three-volume activity-oriented curriculum, *Guiding Growth in Christian Social Living* (Smith & McGreal, 1944), was published to assist elementary teachers (Buetow, 1970). Msgr. Johnson’s death that year halted any development of secondary material, but as Sr. Mary Janet observed, “It [was] distinctly providential that the careful scrutiny of high school programs began...almost simultaneously with the general movement that has been designated Life Adjustment Education for Youth” (Miller, 1952a, pp. 341–342). And although life adjustment education did not contain any suggestions that students work toward the ultimate goal of union with God, Sr. Mary Janet believed that the Catholic version of that program could remedy that deficiency. Indeed, she called that version Christian Life Adjustment (Miller, 1949a). What was especially appealing to Sr. Mary Janet was the program’s emphasis on the dignity of all persons, which was akin to the religious notion of all persons created in God’s image (Miller, 1950). Other Catholic educators concurred. Monsignor Edmund Goebel (1952), superintendent of schools in the Milwaukee Archdiocese, believed, “In the life adjustment program we have a design for Christian social living....No other program in recent years has so easily become the medium of our Christian inheritance” (p. 349).

Staff members from the U.S. Office of Education in charge of managing and promoting life adjustment activities were often on the program of NCEA meetings because they recognized the support for life adjustment education coming from the groups attending those meeting. At the final meeting of the First Life Adjustment Commission, when the recommendation was made to create a second Commission, one-sixth of the participants were Catholic school educators (Miller, 1950). In 1954, 34 dioceses and the District of Columbia reported school-based life-adjustment activities (U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1954).

### Life Adjustment, Catholic Schools, and Progressive Education

As previously indicated, the study conducted by Dorothy Broder (1976) presented an extensive analysis of life adjustment, and, appropriately, included 11 pages discussing Catholic participation in that movement. Broder's (1976) analysis was essentially correct, but entirely lacking any contextual discussion of the surprising involvement of Catholic educators in life adjustment organizational or curricular activities. Father Harold Buetow's (1970) very detailed history of Catholic education included information about the important secular educational theorizing occurring before and during the period of life adjustment education. Surprisingly, given the comprehensive nature of his text, Buetow (1970) does not include any recognition of life adjustment education and the participation of Catholic educators in that movement. What follows is an attempt to correct the omissions of both authors and to explain the development of an altered philosophy of education that facilitated Catholic involvement in life adjustment education and the specific curriculum changes that occurred because of it.

Most Catholic educators were hostile to progressive education from the beginning. For example, they rejected Edward Thorndike's stimulus-response learning theory because its mechanistic view of learning failed to take into account such fundamental concepts as the soul, intellect, and free will. Father William McGucken (1934), an authority on Catholic education who wrote *The Catholic Way in Education*, agreed with that criticism, and was an outspoken critic of educators whose theories challenged traditional educational goals. In higher education that was Charles Eliot, president of Harvard University, and in public education it was John Dewey, both of whom he said were infected with the "Rousseau virus," a disease whose main symptom was increasing student choice in educational matters. McGucken (1934) was critical of the unquestioning acceptance of Dewey by teachers in training who did not recognize that his "philosophy is utterly destructive of everything that Christianity had upheld throughout the ages" (p. 20). According to McGucken (1934), the purpose of the Church's schools at all levels was not to teach subjects but to inculcate a knowledge and love of Jesus Christ and a desire to follow his teachings. Even during the life adjustment era, many Catholic writers continued to attack Dewey, whose views on the natural origins of humankind, and his denial of the supernatural, the soul, and original sin were repulsive to Catholic doctrine.

On the other hand, some Catholic educators pushed back against the outright rejection of progressivism. At the beginning of his tenure as head of the Commission on American Citizenship, Msgr. Johnson (1940) published an article that strongly supported progressive classroom methodology. Even though progressive leaders were religious heretics according to Johnson (1940), he argued that their truths about the educative process should not be overlooked. As he saw it, if God created children with free will, they should be able to use it in a classroom. For Johnson, the all-consuming attention with subject matter was a fetish; subject matter must be balanced with student-centered learning projects and physical and manual activities, all of which would stimulate student intellectual growth. He believed that classrooms should be happy places, and that the doctrine of original sin should not be a justification for classroom despotism.

The rejection of progressive pedagogy and psychology put many Catholic educators in a bind. How could they resist ideas and practices being discussed and implemented by their counterparts in the public schools? Given traditional Catholic deference to authority, they needed, in a sense, someone to give them permission to explore these new developments. Beyond the support for life adjustment already noted, other Catholic commentators produced favorable articles about progressive education during the life adjustment era (1945–1953), thus providing that permission. Those articles appeared in such journals as *The Catholic School Journal*, *The Catholic Educational Review*, and *The Catholic Educator*. One such article, for example, by the Catholic historian Edward Power (1953), argued that many progressive educational ideas were articulated by Bishop John Lancaster Spaulding—well before John Dewey’s views were disseminated. A few years later, another Catholic author, Mother Martha Eleanor (1957), wrote, “It is well to remember that Christ Himself led the way in individualized instruction” (p. 184).

Father Laurence O’Connell’s 1946 book, *Are Catholic Schools Progressive?* surveyed 20 diocesan schools systems and found that some progressive practices were used—but cautiously. And although many diocesan materials used progressive education terminology, O’Connell (1946) got “the impression that diocesan superintendents are more progressive in their ideas than they dare to be in practice” (pp. 99–100). Even as he concluded with a chapter showing how the philosophy of progressive education was different from Catholic beliefs, O’Connell (1946) wrote what was becoming a party line response for many Catholic educators:

And yet the philosophy which has prompted and stimulated growth in progressive education can at times be divorced from the practices to which it has given rise. Thus it is possible to accept improvements in techniques and methods while continuing to reject uncompromisingly the philosophies which have given them birth. (p. 134)

O'Connell (1946) was, then, quite specific about which progressive practices he approved of: modifying curriculum to meet the needs of individual children; using activities as a motivating device; emphasizing social relations as an educational goal; and using testing programs that would yield data to help create child-centered education. All told, this was rather a complete acceptance of the essence of progressive education. The director of the curriculum laboratory at St. Louis University wrote the foreword to O'Connell's (1946) book, in which he expressed the belief that O'Connell had provided an answer "to the question which often comes to minds of Sisters in Catholic Schools: To what extent can progressive practices be accepted and used without compromising Catholic education?" (p. iv).

### **Promoting Curriculum that Met Catholic Student Needs**

Catholic participation in the life adjustment movement and its development of a rationale for using progressive principles and practices indicate that Catholic education was becoming integrated into the American educational mainstream. The siege mentality of an earlier time was dissipating and the single-minded focus on preserving the faith through education was being replaced by a broader array of educational concerns. This sea change was quite evident when examining Catholic analyses of their own secondary schools.

Brother Urban Fleege, a member of the Education Department at Catholic University and a staff associate of the NCEA, wrote an influential three-part article entitled "Issues and Problems Facing Catholic Secondary Schools" in *The Catholic Educational Review* in Spring 1946. Fleege (1946) argued against the exclusion of the less academically talented population of Catholic secondary schools. "Our classroom teaching," he complained, "tends to ascend the steps of the ivory tower instead of descending the more difficult paths of articulation with life" (p. 215). Fleege (1946) proceeded to advocate a common learnings curriculum approach, the inclusion of work experiences in secondary education, and courses in family living—recommendations that were obviously congruent with the major life adjustment emphases just beginning to emerge.

In 1947, *The Catholic Education Review* published an article by Father Michael McKeough entitled “The Curriculum and Pupil Needs.” Fr. McKeough was a member of the Education Department at Catholic University, and a few years later served as a dissertation mentor for Sr. Mary Janet. Fr. McKeough’s (1947) contribution to the dialogue about Catholic secondary schools serving pupil needs was his citation of both ancient and contemporary Church authorities to demonstrate the acceptability of showing concern about the temporal needs of students and his description of the wide range of abilities in a typical high school class. In addition, he suggested that Catholic principals consult current curriculum literature on pupil needs—even though most of it was from non-Catholic sources. Interestingly, the only curriculum expert Fr. McKeough (1947) mentioned was Harl Douglass, who, in 1950, published the first major curriculum text related to life adjustment education.

*The Catholic Educational Review* continued to push for a needs-based approach to curriculum development. A commentary written by Brother Leroy Flynn (1948) answered no to the question posed in the title of his article: “Are Catholic Secondary Schools Doing Their Job?” In 1949, Brother Louis Faerber answered yes to the question posed by his title: “Are We Victimizing the Non-Academic Pupil?” Faerber (1949) cited the aim of the First Life Adjustment Commission to formulate a response to his title question, and then wrote at length about the theological proposition that all pupils (persons) are equal members of the Mystical Body of Christ, thus requiring the creation of educational programs for individuals with varying mental abilities. It is not surprising that this view was similar to Sr. Mary Janet’s approach as Br. Faerber also did his doctoral work at Catholic University and was guided through his dissertation by Fr. McKeough. Catholic University had created a Department of Education in 1908, primarily to provide education and training for sisters who were teachers. Its founding dean, Father Thomas Shields, was more liberal than many contemporary scholars at Catholic colleges, and, somewhat uniquely, he also agreed with some of the progressive educational ideas that were emerging during that era. Shields founded *The Catholic Educational Review* in 1911, and it was that journal that most vigorously promoted the life adjustment/pupil needs educational perspective. Others who supported that approach published their views in *The Catholic Educator*, *The Catholic School Journal*, and the *National Catholic Educational Association Proceedings*.

The most substantial evidence of a Catholic acceptance of life adjustment and its emphasis on meeting the individual needs of students was presented in *Catholic Secondary Education: A National Survey*, a book written by Sr.

Mary Janet Miller in 1949 (Miller, 1949b). The book was published by the Department of Education of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, an organization controlled by American Catholic bishops. The foreword by Monsignor Frederick Hochwalt, head of that department, specifically endorsed the work begun by Charles Prosser without reservation. Hochwalt believed that because of life adjustment education, “the means are now at hand for appropriately educating all American youth and successfully introducing them into our adult society” (p. vii). He noted that the survey returned by 1,581 Catholic high schools was essential, so that “any curriculum reorganization which may be undertaken may be accomplished with the least possible amount of confusion” (p. viii). Catholic school curriculum needed to change, according to Miller (1949b), because “students spend most of their school hours on the academic program and that... individual differences are actually quite poorly cared for” (p. 67). For some 70 pages dealing with curriculum issues, Miller encouraged teachers and schools to rethink their historical orientation to selectivity and to educate a broader array of students, knowing that they required a different type of education.

Religion, for example, should not simply focus on doctrine but should adopt a “learning by [Catholic] living” approach (Miller, 1949b, p. 70). Social studies should go beyond traditional historical subject matter and help all students become better Christian citizens who are more involved in local community affairs. English curriculum should expand beyond traditional literature and incorporate more modern texts that appeal to different abilities and tastes, and are more congruent with Christian social values. English classes should also place greater emphasis on the written and spoken language skills needed by all students. “Science has outstanding value in relation to education for life adjustment, since it plays an important part in many daily life situations” (p. 80), especially with regard to a healthful and happy family life. Mathematics should be more practical and oriented to its functional use in everyday life. “For some students at least, the general mathematics or even arithmetic courses offer much more value than algebra or geometry for which they have no aptitude and no need in life” (p. 83). Clearly, Miller concurred with her secular counterparts that all subjects could be organized to include components that help students have a more successful life, broadly defined.

That reasoning persists in the text, whether the subject was fine arts, home and family living, or industrial arts—all should have a greater place in the curriculum. Miller sought to remind Catholic educators that there was dig-

nity in all kinds of work: “Christ was a carpenter,” she noted, “and He chose fishermen to establish His church” (1949b, p. 89). The text’s dominant argument was that increases in secondary school enrollments naturally resulted in a wider array of student abilities, and that Catholic schools had to adjust accordingly. Unlike earlier times, high school completion was now a requirement for attaining the good life, and the older approach of “admitting only the best” Catholic students was inconsistent with the principle of human dignity, which requires preparing students of all abilities, talents, and interests to participate in all kinds of occupations (p. 133). In a statement with which Charles Prosser would almost entirely agree, Miller asserted that it

is clearly the right of every individual to attain the fullest growth possible in view of his' native endowment, in order that, as he journeys toward an eternal home, he may have happiness and satisfaction in his church, in his family life, in his occupation, in his life as a citizen, and in his hours of leisure. (p. 129)

It is not coincidental that this 1949 statement was written while Miller was serving as a member of the First Life Adjustment Commission.

Curriculum development by Catholic educators sympathetic to life adjustment education followed the same pattern that emerged in public schools. While in theory, life adjustment approaches should have pervaded the curriculum, in fact, its implementation was most often limited to a small portion of the academic program. Indeed, Catholic educators accepted the goals, method, and the mechanism for creating a common learnings course, but added another dimension to it: Christian social living (Maria, 1951; McCluskey, 1948; Miller, 1952b). Similarly, there was an increased call for business education courses, in which “business skills and aptitudes...will be directed and guided and inspired by religious principles and which will be stimulated by religious motivation both at school and in the workaday world” (Marie, 1953, p. 160). Articles cited earlier by Brothers Fleege (1946) and Faerber (1949) called for increased school-work programs, and *The Catholic School Journal* promoted more vocational education through a series of five articles published between October 1952 and June 1953.

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1 Any instances of noninclusive language found in this article are reproduced from the original text(s) and are not the preferred word choice of the author or the editors of the *Journal of Catholic Education*.

The most significant impact of life adjustment education in Catholic secondary schools was the increase in programs for home and family living. Unquestionably, the most famous of these programs was a four-year student needs-based sequence in “Christian Family Living” developed by the Presentation Sisters in San Francisco. Although the program included typical home economic units, its deeper purpose was to help young women “measure up to the standard of...true Christian womanhood” (McFeely, 1948a, p. 395). Developers also saw the program as a mechanism to combat a perceived decline in religion in American society resulting from a deterioration in the quality of home life (McFeely, 1948b). The Presentation Sisters’ curriculum was published and widely adopted in Catholic schools, and similar courses were developed for boys (McFeely, 1950). The curriculum was often cited as a model of life adjustment education in speeches and articles primarily intended for public school educators.

### **American Catholicism at Midcentury: A Social Context for Accepting Life Adjustment Education**

As one would expect, a substantial alteration of an educational philosophy cannot be explained simply as a change of heart. For the 100 years prior to the life adjustment education movement, Catholic education was known for its scholastic orientation, and its belief that religious themes and moral ideals should dictate the entire curriculum. Moreover, the management of school children was regarded as appropriately authoritarian. Beyond a professional interest in pedagogical developments, what was happening in the Church and larger society that would compel a willingness on the part of Catholic educators to explore an alternative perspective?

The Catholic Church was the religious home for the mass of European immigrants that came to the United States between 1840 and 1920. The anti-Catholic views that were prevalent in this country caused the Church to become a defensive organization in order to protect the faith of its members and to provide an array of ordinary services that Church members needed. By the 1930s, there was a parallel set of Catholic organizations that represented an obvious withdrawal from the secular society and the creation of a “completely enveloping state-within-a-state for the...Catholic community” (Morris, 1997, p. 164). There were Catholic newspapers, magazines, radio programs and book clubs. Professionally, one could join organizations for Catholic lawyers, doctors, psychologists, educators, and nurses. For academics, there were



Catholic organizations for sociologists, historians, anthropologists, writers, and poets. Catholic businessmen had an organization, as did Catholic trade unionists (Morris, 1967). Even more visible to Americans everywhere were the monumental churches Catholic leaders built, as well as their schools, hospitals, and facilities for care of the elderly. Catholicism was the country's largest denomination, and the presence of Catholics as politicians, as teachers in public schools, and as members of fire and police departments was evidence of a triumphant Church whose powerful influence could not be ignored.

Surprisingly, the security this state of affairs gave Catholics was also the basis for their shift to a more engaged relationship with the broader American society. While it is understood that a culture can change a religion, it is also true that religion can help shape a culture. Historians David O'Brien (1989) and Jay Dolan (2002) have referred to this change of direction within the church as "public Catholicism." Essentially, the Church was taking advantage of the opportunity to shape American culture in ways aligned with religious views but not with doctrines, narrowly defined. Catholics were accepted by other Americans not simply because of their large presence and the good work of their service organizations, but because many Catholic social and political positions evolved in ways that were congruent with the beliefs of many other Americans. In the 1930s, a time of great economic distress, notable Catholic figures like Monsignor John Ryan and Dorothy Day argued in favor of just wages and other worker needs, and Catholic support for trade unions showed a side of Catholicism that focused on the common good, and not simply the needs of the Church. Catholic leaders were vigorously anti-communist, and Father John Courtney Murray advanced arguments advocating religious freedom in a democracy that separated church and state, in contrast to older notions that these two entities should be united as a mechanism of social control. After Pearl Harbor, Catholics in general and leaders like Cardinal Spellman were exceedingly patriotic in support of the war effort. If Catholics maintained important civic organizations, sought economic justice, and were anticommunist and patriotic defenders of democracy, why would they not be invited into fuller participation in American social and institutional life? This realization was, no doubt, a partial explanation for inviting Father Bernadine Myers to be one of nine institutional representatives on the First Life Adjustment Commission. In the 1940s, an evolution of American educational practice was under way, and by joining that effort, Catholic educators were in a position to help shape the direction of that evolution and

infuse it with a deeper moral perspective. Dolan (2002) described the change in Catholicism in this way:

Looking back into the past it becomes clear that the first half of the twentieth century was a key transition era in the history of American Catholicism. Though this was the golden age of the immigrant church, it was also a time of decisive change as a modern American culture began to develop. As society changed, so did Catholicism as it sought to come to terms with modern America. (p. 179)

### **What Happened Next: Catholic Education in the 1950s and Beyond**

The life adjustment education movement had a short life span, and as Broder (1976), Franklin (1985) and Kliebard (1986) have shown, courses associated with life adjustment often had a prior history in the district, were modified to meet local needs, or were subsequently abandoned. It is a commonplace to note that educational proposals, no matter how strenuously promoted, are often only partially implemented or ignored in the hands of classroom teachers behind closed doors. There is no reason to believe that the proposed alterations of traditional curricula by life adjustment educators in the public schools fared any differently in the Catholic sector. When Bestor (1953) and like-minded critics took aim at life adjustment, they were resurrecting an attack launched by William Bagley (1938) and his “Essentialist” colleagues in the 1930s against Deweyan-inspired progressive education. Bestor (1953) was more successful than Bagley (1938) because life adjustment education contained an excess of trivial information that could be ridiculed—moreover, external circumstances like the Cold War fostered a return to more scholarly approaches in mathematics and science for national security purposes and, ultimately, it was not really possible to dislodge the concept of traditional subjects from the ways in which people thought about schools.

Life adjustment education had only a brief history in both public and Catholic schools, but it marked the first time that Catholic educators became seriously involved with a secular reform movement, and that involvement, once began, never ceased. The next education movement to come along, discipline-centered curriculum reform in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, was quickly embraced by Catholic educators. This reform movement was initially led by disciplinary scholars in mathematics and physics from influential universities, and then by national professional associations in biology and chemistry. Later in the 1960s, social science and humanities disciplines joined the

curriculum reform movement that was already underway. The essential goal of this reform was to demonstrate that the disciplines were not completed fields of studies to be memorized in schools as though they had emerged whole cloth, but that they evolved from the work of many colleagues who followed processes of investigation dictated by the “structure” of a particular discipline. This structure was composed of generalizations, fundamental principles, key concepts, and research methodologies, and knowing those determined how one worked in the discipline—whether one was a professional in a lab or a student in a school. This view of the disciplines fit with an emerging instructional orientation to inquiry and problem solving that focused on aspects of the subject appropriate for the developmental level and interests of students (Franklin, 2008). As Postman and Weingartner (1969) have suggested, this outlook made teaching a subversive activity, as instructional outcomes could not be predicted and controlled.

Catholic interest in this type of curriculum reform can be judged by the number of presentations related to it at NCEA meetings, as well as by the ceaseless stream of journal articles discussing the new mathematics and science curricula, and subsequently, changes in social studies and language arts. In the *Catholic School Journal* alone, between 1958 and 1963, there were 15 articles related to the new curricula in these subject areas. Ellis Joseph (2001), citing Philip Gleason, noted that by the 1950s, Catholic education abandoned the idea of a curriculum based on a Neo-Scholastic theological and philosophic synthesis in favor of academic excellence as defined by academics in higher education. Gleason was right, of course, even though he failed to notice the abandonment that was underway in the 1940s. The educational isolation of Catholic practitioners that prevailed prior to the 1940s no longer existed. No elaborate rationale was needed to justify involvement. Discipline-based curriculum reform constituted good educational practice in the early 1960s, and there was no question that Catholics would participate in it.

Also contributing to the participation of Catholic educators in discipline-centered curriculum reform was the emergence of the Sister Formation movement in the early 1940s that slowly, but successfully by the 1960s, achieved the goal of enabling teaching sisters to become better educated before beginning their professional careers. Many religious communities opened their own colleges to accomplish this objective, the most famous of which was Marillac College in St. Louis, established by the Daughters of Charity in 1954. The Marillac teacher education curriculum was virtually identical to best practices found in secular teacher education programs of the

time (Meyers, 1960). As Monsignor James Donohue, the superintendent of Baltimore's diocesan schools noted in 1965:

I think the curriculum development in the Catholic school system has been nothing short of phenomenal. This is due to the religious communities who, through Sister Formation, are producing extremely competent people in the area of curriculum. (*Catholic Education Today*, 1965, p. 55)

In addition to curriculum reform, the period from approximately the early 1960s to the mid-1970s was known for its emphasis on the importance of interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, an approach known as humanistic or affective education. An important leader in this movement was Carl Rogers (1969), a psychologist whose ideas influenced educational practice through the publication of his book *Freedom to Learn*. While Rogers (1969) firmly believed in inquiry learning and discovery and identifying relevant student issues to enhance motivation, he added some specific suggestions regarding student-teacher relationships. For Rogers (1969), the teacher qualities that facilitated significant learning included showing one's real self to students instead of the masked personality long required by professional traditions; demonstrating a teacher-to-student relationship based on value and trust; and showing empathy—that is, teachers seeking to understand students' perspectives and the circumstances of their lives.

This humanistic view of education was, in the late 1960s, compatible with the evolving goals of Catholic education. It was, in many ways, congruent with the openness to modern thinking encouraged by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and its message to value community more and diminish submission to hierarchical authority in pursuit of heightened spiritual growth and the greater good for all members of society. A humanistic classroom was something like that: a community of learners encouraged by a nonauthoritarian leader who creates and facilitates opportunities for personal, social, and intellectual growth. Catholic school teachers—especially religious sisters who taught—bought into that idea for numerous reasons, many of which were not necessarily related to education; but they were also encouraged to embrace this approach by the literature available to them in Catholic educational journals.

In 1970, with humanistic educational ideas omnipresent in contemporary educational literature, two developments related to Catholic journals fur-

ther demonstrated the connections between educational perspectives that influenced both public and Catholic schools. The first development was the appearance of the short-lived (1970–1976) *Notre Dame Journal of Education*. During its first three years, the journal published articles such as Paul Goodman (1970) on incidental education, Carl Rogers's colleague William Coulson (1971) on encounter groups, and Nancy Dill (1972) on open classrooms. Perhaps the most intriguing article the journal published was Sidney Cornelia Callahan's (1970) "The 'Aha' Experience in Education," a plea for ecstatic learning experiences that was, except for three inconsequential sentences, devoid of any religious implications.

The second development was the appearance of *Momentum*, the contemporary and attractive official publication of the NCEA that replaced the drab *National Catholic Educational Association Bulletin*. In its first year, *Momentum* contained an article entitled a "Groovy Approach to Education," which, ironically, was a glowing description of a behavioral objectives project at a Minneapolis Catholic elementary school (Mihelic & Publicover, 1970). A photo essay entitled "School Without Walls" (Wright, 1970) appeared a few months later, portraying the architecturally innovative learning center at a Catholic elementary school in San Francisco. The journal ended the year with a description of a "Futuristic High School," a Catholic school in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, whose innovative programs included team teaching, large and small group instruction, resource centers, and independent study and elective options (Germain, 1970). During the next two years, *Momentum* published articles on values clarification techniques, student self-discovery, "happy-time" learning centers, and other descriptions of popular neoprogressive educational initiatives. There can be no doubt that Catholic participation in educational reforms that began in the post-World War II era continued and expanded during the decades that followed.

### **A Brief Look at Two Catholic Schools in the Early 1970s**

Examining individual schools to illustrate qualities that show them as exemplars of a particular educational philosophy has a long tradition in the study of educational history (Semel & Sadovnik, 1999). In the latter part of the twentieth century, looking at schools for this purpose came to be thought of as creating a portrait, a representation that shows the essential features of the subject in a flattering or critical light (Lightfoot, 1983; Perrone, 1985). In the section that follows, two such new school portraits will be created that

clearly represent the specific educational developments described in previous parts of this article. What's more, the schools they portray match the educational ideals expressed in three of the leading educational texts of the late 1960s and early 1970s: Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner's (1969) *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*; Carl Rogers's (1969) *Freedom to Learn*, and Charles Silberman's (1970) *Crisis in the Classroom*. I visited these schools multiple times between 1970 and 1975. The first, Catholic Central High School in Troy, New York, is a diocesan coeducational institution; the second, Our Lady of Lourdes, is a parochial school located in Rochester, New York, and now exists as a diocesan school that combines two parishes and is named Seton Catholic School.

Catholic Central was founded in 1923 as a traditional college preparatory school for boys, but became coeducational in the 1960s and acquired many of the hallmarks of a contemporary progressive school (Silberman, 1970). Most significantly, beginning in 1969, the school used an eight-day modular schedule with a typical instructional pattern that began with a large lecture on day one, followed by two days of regular-sized classes, and, finally, two or three days for small group discussions. Those discussions took place on the third floor, where walls had been taken down for the purpose of creating space for that small group activity. The goal was to increase motivation through the instructional variety that flowed from that arrangement; the days when the class did not meet offered increased opportunity for teacher planning, individual tutoring, or personal counseling. The school had about 2,000 students, and, according to faculty members, students thrived under this new system.

Leadership for planning and implementing this instructional arrangement came from the school principal, Edward Fitzpatrick, a Catholic priest from the Albany, New York diocese. Father Fitzpatrick had been on the faculty since 1958, was chair of the Music Department, vice principal, and then principal, beginning in 1968. Known as an imaginative music teacher, Father Fitzpatrick immediately threw himself into the task of making creative changes in the operation of the school, and modular scheduling was one way to do it. With the help of a consultant group and a similarly imaginative priest-counselor on staff, Fitzpatrick dedicated the 1968–1969 school year to working with faculty to plan the transition to the new scheduling format, which was slated to begin in 1969. It was not easy for a school the size of Catholic Central to accomplish this transition. In the pre-computer era, Fr. Fitzpatrick and his counselor colleague created the schedule manually in the summer of 1969, spreading paper components throughout spaces in the library until

things fit together. Modular scheduling was one of the popular reforms of the period, and it worked so well at Catholic Central that educational observers from in and outside the area came to see it in action.

An additional schedule modification included what was called a “mini-week,” a time between semesters for teachers and students to engage in activities outside the bounds of the traditional curriculum. Ideas were solicited from students and teachers, and typically included a variety of arts and crafts as well as an array of outdoor activities. The social studies teacher who did furniture refurbishing with students was certainly showing more of his “real” self, an approach that humanistic educational theory suggested would have positive learning outcomes and help promote student personal growth.

The flexible scheduling system allowed for the implementation of another innovation, a Career Investigation Program. When a student expressed interest in a particular career path, time was available to create an internship allowing the student to shadow a community professional who was doing that work. Here, again, is an example of Catholic Central putting into practice a notable educational reform being used in public schools. Career education was the top reform priority of Sidney Marland, the U.S. Commissioner of Education from 1970 to 1972.

The school had only one official counselor, but four teachers (who were priests) were appointed to individually oversee counseling for each of the four classes. The supervising priest-teacher for each class worked with individual teachers to create counseling opportunities within their schedules (J. Soja, personal communication, 28 September 2013; Dominic Ingemie, personal communication, 30 October 2013). This system, born of necessity, was similar to what a decade later was seen as an ideal way to counsel students; teachers spending noninstructional time with students, getting to know them personally, and counseling them according to their specific circumstances. The neo-progressive Coalition of Essential Schools founded in 1984 advocated such arrangements and called them “advisories.”

Father Dominic Ingemie came to Catholic Central in 1968 as a religion teacher and became vice-principal. As such, he was an active participant in the changes noted above. When Fr. Fitzpatrick was appointed to another position in the diocese in 1974, Fr. Ingemie was appointed principal and remained in that position until 1981. Under Ingemie’s leadership, Catholic Central’s progressive practices were continued but modified as needed and expanded. To provide more individualized curriculum opportunities for students, arrangements were made with the local Board of Cooperative Educa-

tional Services to accept Catholic Central students into the array of technical programs offered for students from multiple districts in New York's Capital District. Students who needed help with reading could avail themselves of the two teachers specifically hired to provide that assistance. To help entering students successfully navigate a scheduling system that provided free time for individual work, a "how to study" course was developed. While there is no direct connection, such opportunities were precisely the type favored by life adjustment educators.

There were also changes of a different sort. In line with the concept of discipline-based curriculum reform, a biology teacher developed Learning Activities Packages (LAP). LAPs were a cutting-edge instructional approach that, although worked on by individual students, contained a common set of objectives, resources, and suggested activities, and a self-evaluation test. While LAPs were being developed around the country in funded educational learning laboratories, at Catholic Central, they were done in-house. Another change was the creation of special senior seminars for students who had nearly completed their graduation requirements. A popular example was a seminar in "Future Studies," a hot topic in the 1970s inspired by the future shock discussions derived from the work of Alvin Toffler (D. Ingemie, personal communication, 30 October 2013). In the region in which it is located, Catholic Central High School, during the period from 1968 to 1981, was a leading example of a successful effort to implement best practices in education. This was the way Catholic education had been heading since 1945. It was primarily two Catholic priests who were responsible for leading the school in that direction—which may be surprising to some, but it should not be.

The second example of educational change in a Catholic setting was Our Lady of Lourdes parochial school located in Brighton, New York, a few blocks from the Rochester City line. Brighton was an upper-middle-class community, and the Lourdes student population was generally drawn from that class. The faculty was somewhat evenly divided between the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, who lived in a convent on parish property, and a lay faculty evenly divided between men and women. The sisters were the epitome of religious woman who quickly modernized after Vatican II; the lay faculty was young and generally not certified as teachers, although many of the religious and lay faculty were taking classes leading to certification.

Obvious characteristics of this faculty were its creative bent, its orientation toward student projects in and outside the classroom, and its awareness of the benefit of community building among themselves and with their



students. There was a fifth-grade teacher who used portfolios for students to save their work, read books to them throughout the year, and allowed her students to play chess when their work was completed. The class made ceramic pots that the teacher then fired up in a kiln for them; she taught them knitting and origami. Her class raised ducks and chickens, published poetry, and did cooking lessons in the convent kitchen. She was a sister, but all faculty had access to the convent and were often invited as a group for social reasons. This teacher left Lourdes in the mid-1970s, and the religious order a few years later, but she is still friends with several people who were Lourdes faculty members 40 years ago, an indication of the strength of the faculty community of which she was a member (C. Angione, personal communication, 17 September 2013).

An outstanding example of inquiry learning at Lourdes was a 55-student field trip to Washington, DC, organized by a sixth-grade teacher who was the first male ever to teach at that school. Here is his summary of that activity:

In class, [the students] learned to write letters, plan the budget, sketch the buildings, sing patriotic songs, deliver speeches, know history, draw maps, paraphrase the constitution, (and) plan an itinerary. Outside class they experienced the sense of community effort, raising \$5000 through carwashes, bake sales, button sales, musical-drama performances, and written community solicitations. During the 5 day trip, they kept journals. They sang and performed at the White House and at the U.S. Capitol. The project related ordinary school skills to an extraordinary once-in-a-lifetime experience. It impacted the community, profoundly affected the lives of students, and gave the teacher an incredible sense of purpose. (K. Sarkis, personal communication, 19 September 2013)

The Lourdes faculty read and discussed contemporary education books and was aware of Postman and Weingartner's (1969) *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. As those authors noted, "The inquiry method is not designed to do better what older environments try to do. It activates different senses, attitudes, and perceptions; it generates a different, bolder, and more potent kind of intelligence" (p. 27). Inquiry does not magically happen, and Postman and Weingartner (1969) identified the key factor that allowed it to happen: "We take it as axiomatic that the attitudes of teachers are the most important

characteristic of the inquiry environment” (p. 33). Clearly, Lourdes teachers were helping their students see the world differently and perceive it more intelligently.

A final example of Lourdes teachers who facilitated an inquiry environment was primarily the work of two female seventh- and eighth-grade teachers who taught literature, communication skills, and theater arts, among other things. One teacher was (and remains) a sister, the other was married with three young children. They conceptualized a play called *Carnival of Life*, which was a critique of the alienation in modern schools and society, a theme that was somewhat familiar in the 1960s era. “Men go to the moon to wonder,” the program cover stated, but “children go to the circus to understand.” The carnival framework allowed a runaway girl to meet a magical clown who took her around the circus where they met performers who sang, danced, and read literary selections and poetry, all of which were related to living an authentic life and creating a world in which “you cannot lie.” Students from all grade levels participated in the performance; they worked throughout the school year creating scenes for the play (E. Ognibene, personal communication, 16 September 2013). A reporter for the *Rochester Catholic Courier-Journal* wrote that the production “must be the most unusual and original play ever put on by an elementary school” (Moynehan, 1972, p. 13).

These examples only hint at the progressive orientation of this Catholic parochial school. Promoting student creativity was a key objective of many activities. High quality field trips were used to inspire students to write original songs; anthologies of student work were created; fairy tales were rewritten; and dioramas were built to highlight themes of books they read. Modular scheduling supported these kinds of creative activities, and teachers periodically met classes that were not the ones to which they had been assigned, thus providing fresh perspectives for both students and teachers. Friday afternoons were set aside for activities outside the boundaries of normal curriculum objectives; teachers taught material related to their out-of-school interests; parents with skills in areas that would interest students were guest speakers; and outside experts came in to teach material from their fields that would engage students. Not surprisingly, faculty and students created unusual liturgies that were spiritual, interdisciplinary, and community building. Social justice issues were discussed; there were sponsored walks to raise money for charities, and, most significantly, Lourdes participated in an Urban-Suburban Transfer Program with the City of Rochester that enrolled five or six inner city students per year in the school. When activities went beyond the end of

the school day, Lourdes teachers drove those students home (M. Weis, personal communication, 18 September 2013).

Perhaps the most exclusive private or the wealthiest public school would have some of the educational elements described above, but Our Lady of Lourdes was a Catholic parochial school, one that defied traditional stereotypes associated with schools from that sector. Much of the credit for this orientation belongs to Sister Mary Ellen Dundon, a progressive nun who hired or received the cadre of young teachers (lay and religious), making this school work, in part, by getting out of their way. Subsequently, this approach became a necessity; Sr. Mary Ellen was diagnosed with a debilitating illness, which led to her death in 1971 at the age of 51.

Sr. Mary Ellen entered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester in 1939, and shortly thereafter was sent with four other sisters to Selma, Alabama, to open a mission. From 1942 to 1963, she taught at three Catholic schools from grades eight through 12. Lourdes was her first and only appointment as a principal. During her time in this position, team teaching at the junior high level began, and the primary grades were organized on a nongraded basis. Reading and speech labs and a resource center were established to enhance individualized instruction, and an enrichment program was expanded to include art, music, dance, and modern language instruction. Annual musicals were produced, and a junior high singing group called the Unity Builders Association performed throughout the community. When Sr. Mary Ellen died, a special performance was produced and performed in her honor at the Nazareth College Arts Center (Rochester, New York). A play, written as a parody of the rigid education thinking that was opposite to her perspective, ended with an epilogue that said in part, "As an educator, hers was a spirit of love, vision, freedom and creativity....[We perform] our play, our songs, our dance, our poetry...but she inspires them. They are the finished product of her years at our school." (Sister Mary Ellen File).

The information noted above tempts one to imagine Carl Rogers wandering into Lourdes and remarking how welcome and motivated he felt in that environment; similarly, one can envision Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner (1969) walking down hallways peering into classrooms and thinking quite happily that what they had described theoretically could actually be seen operating effectively. Most of all, one can imagine Monsignor George Johnson and Sister Mary Janet Miller observing what this particular Catholic school had become, congratulating each other because the seeds they had planted 30 years earlier, though altered, had fully bloomed.

### **Conclusion: Catholic Schools, Current Issues, and Common Core State Standards**

Given the acceptance by Catholic educators of curriculum and instructional reform ideas affecting public education between 1945 and 1975, it is not surprising that Catholic connections to contemporary reform developments continue to exist. In the 1990s, for example, research in California showed that State Curriculum Frameworks and texts designed to deliver those frameworks were used by Catholic schools and were related to the academic success of those schools. That success was not the result of some specifically designed Catholic school curriculum (Williams, 2001).

A 2012 issue of *Momentum* (Trends, 2012) contains articles on the length of the school day, high school-university partnerships, effective teaching for students with individualized education plans, technology learning laboratories, environmental education, earning college credit while in high school, preprofessional internships, teaching with technology, and a biotechnology curriculum that has students involved in gene sequencing. Looking at the contents page of this issue, one can readily see an emphasis on topics of concern to educators anywhere, whether in public or Catholic schools. This trend in a journal whose intended readers are primarily Catholic school educators reflects the kind of changes occurring in Catholic education since the middle of the 20th century.

In 2013, the National Catholic Education Association established an award to honor its retiring president, Karen M. Ristau. The purpose of the award was to recognize Catholic schools that create especially innovative programs or instructional approaches. The first recipient of the Ristau award was a group of schools in the Diocese of Paterson that developed a program to introduce an integrated STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) curriculum in seven middle schools during the 2010–2011 school year. The program was subsequently expanded to include nine elementary schools in 2013–2014, and three high schools in 2014–2015. In addition to the new curriculum, the schools organized professional development programs to assist teachers in creating interdisciplinary lesson plans that were more student-centered and that utilized technology to promote a deeper understanding of that curriculum (Baier, 2014). Increasing STEM education had been a top priority of the U.S. Department of Education since 2010, and Catholic Schools have been in sync with this initiative from the beginning (U.S. Department of Education).

A current Catholic and public school classroom commonality is the acceptance by 100 of the 195 diocesan school systems of the Common Core curriculum standards adopted recently by 45 states in order to be eligible to apply for federal grants that support several public school educational reform programs (Kelly, 2013; Robelen, 2012). As a California diocesan superintendent explained, "What we came to decide was that if the public schools were going to implement them (Common Core State Standards), it was something we should take a good, hard look at.... We looked into them with an honest eye... and realized they were something we wanted to pursue" (Robelen, 2012). As has been presented in this article, it was by now a long tradition for Catholic educators to look at developments in the public sector and adapt them with whatever modification seemed necessary. The National Catholic Educational Association (2013), for example, developed a "Position Statement on the Common Core State Standards" that, while not a ringing endorsement, delineates reasons why Catholic schools could adopt those standards, and how they can be infused within the culture of a Catholic school. There is also a practical matter noted by an NCEA public policy and research official: "These [Common Core] developments will directly affect the resources available to Catholic school educators and teachers to be hired in the future" (McDonald, 2012, p. 14). The resources this official is referring to are the text books and testing materials developed to meet Common Core requirements, and the college education programs being restructured to produce teachers better able to teach in the Common Core environment.

There is Catholic school enthusiasm for the common core, but there is also criticism for the same reasons expressed by individuals and organizations in the public sector. The main criticisms are the intrusiveness of federal involvement in what should be local educational affairs, the overemphasis on testing to measure student proficiency related to the core, content that is out of sync with student developmental abilities and interests, the omission of traditional and valuable subject matter content, and the scientifically unproven assumption that student scores are exclusively related to teacher effectiveness while disregarding the host of environmental factors that obviously suppress student achievement (Ravitch, 2013). The Catholic opposition to the common core can be seen in the ad hoc organizations that have emerged to protest its adoption, in criticism in the pages of a conservative publication like *Crisis Magazine* (Guernsey, 2013; Hendershott, 2013), and in the opposition of some Catholic university scholars (Strauss, 2013). Nevertheless, in this

debate over the Common Core, once again one sees evidence of the similarity of the aspirations and the concerns of public and Catholic school educators.

Regarding the use of the Common Core, operational assumptions within Catholic systems seem more appropriate than those imposed on the public schools. In practice, Catholic schools assume that teachers are the best creators of curriculum, that tests should be used to measure student strengths but also to provide data needed to overcome weakness, and that test results are a means to organize professional development activities, not an opportunity to humiliate or dismiss teachers (Mancini, 2013; McDonald, 2012; J. Soja, personal communication, 28 September 2013). If these logical and professional assumptions were accepted everywhere, the heated debates over the use of Common Core state standards could likely diminish.

Some of the Common Core debates were the result of the unwise and often politically driven rollout of the standards. Unbelievably, in New York State, for example, student assessment of Common Core proficiencies began before the Common Core standards had been completely implemented in the schools. There was such a backlash from parents and educational organizations that in February 2014, the New York State Board of Regents agreed to slow down the Common Core implementation schedule (Karlin, 2014). Ironically, during that same month, a group of Catholic school superintendents participated in a specially arranged conference to discuss the Common Core and heard a representative of one diocese describe a more sensible three-year approach to Common Core implementation. In year one, the focus was on the instructional changes that implementation would necessitate. During the second year, a multitude of resources were gathered that would be used when switching to the Common Core. The third year was devoted to developing alternative forms of assessment related to the new curriculum and strategies used to teach it (Organizing Committee, 2014). This thoughtful approach was not the norm in the public sector (Hess, 2014).

Catholic schools are not public schools; they have a special mission to preserve and enhance their Catholic identity to enable students achieve the religious, developmental, academic, and social action goals that constitute the essential objectives of a Catholic education. Taking a page from the Common Core state standards movement, a leadership group of Catholic educators also developed a set of standards in 2012. The result was the publication of the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and*

*Secondary Schools* (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). In the view of the educator who led the development of these standards:

It is unconscionable to ask parents to make a choice between high quality academics and faith based education. The stakes are simply too high. This means that Catholic school leaders have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that their school is absolutely, irresistibly *excellent*, and deeply authentically *Catholic*. (Ozar, 2012b, p. 10)

Here is another specific example of Catholic educators finding a worthwhile development in the public sector and adopting it in a way that best fits their needs. Along with the other examples presented earlier, this assertion verifies Hunt and Walch's (2010) claim introduced at the beginning of this article, but with much more specificity and direction for the future.

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