

DECLINING CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND VARIOUS
WAYS THAT CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL LEADERS ARE ADDRESSING THE TRENDS

A research paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

EDU 7901, Advanced Research and Design

to

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of the Division of

ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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Chapter I

Introduction

The role of Catholic education in the life of the Church has been the subject of discussion by many prominent leaders (Flannery 1992, Laghi 1998, Miller 2006, USCCB 1972 and 2005). Catholic education has been examined in the context of a call to serve the community at large, not to be limited to those of prominent means. “Recognition of the past failures should not obscure the fact that the Church in many places does provide a wide variety of services for the poor, including schools of high quality, often at the cost of heroic sacrifice and with encouraging success” (USCCB, 1972, p.34). This call to educate can also be seen in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. “The influence of the Church in the field of education is shown in a special manner by the Catholic school. No less than other schools does the Catholic school pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth” (Flannery, 1996). This influence is being affected by demographic population shifts in the United States. The responses of various dioceses to these shifts have varied. Having an understanding of these responses may be an asset to future Catholic educational leaders.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is twofold: 1) to determine which Catholic dioceses in the United States have a Catholic elementary school population that is declining at a rate greater than the demographic shifts indicated by the U.S. Census, within the same diocese and (2) to survey what Catholic education leaders are doing to address the growing problem of the loss of Catholic

elementary school students, in the dioceses that have a Catholic elementary school population that is declining at a rate greater than the demographic shifts indicated by the U.S. Census.

Problem Statement

The population of the Catholic elementary schools has been on the downward trend since 1965 (DeFiore, 2011). Dioceses within the United States have been addressing this trend in a number of ways. The difficulty for Catholic educational leadership is to determine which approach is an effective manner to deal with this trend within their own diocese.

Background Information

The Catholic elementary school system has been an integral part of the education system in the United States. “The bishops have repeatedly called on the entire Catholic community - clergy, religious and laity - to support Catholic schools, not just those parishes that currently sponsor a school” (DeFiore, Convey and Schuttloffel, 2009, p.6). The declining enrollment in the American Catholic school system has given rise to new strategies for addressing this trend. “From 2000 to 2009, Catholic school enrollments decreased by over 17 percent from 2.65 million students to 2.19 million students, a loss of 460,000 students in just nine years” (DeFiore, et al., 2009, p.9). This nationwide trend is set against of backdrop of major demographic shifts in the country (Hughes, 2010). Given these two occurrences, it is possible that the reconfiguration of Catholic schools, particularly on the elementary level, may be being addressed differently in different dioceses. For this reason it is important to examine how Catholic dioceses in the United States, with Catholic elementary school student populations that are shrinking at a rate slower than the corresponding rates of the U.S. Census, are addressing this problem.

Significance

This study may inform Catholic educational leaders of the various processes that have been utilized by Catholic dioceses throughout the United States in addressing the declining Catholic elementary school enrollment trends within their respective dioceses. By better understanding the various ways that declining enrollment trends are being addressed, future Catholic Church leaders may be better equipped to make informed decisions.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the analysis:

- 1.) Which Catholic dioceses in the United States have seen a decline in enrollment in Catholic elementary schools between 2005 and 2010 that is less than the demographic shift in the same diocese?
- 2.) What are the processes the Catholic elementary school leaders are using to address the Catholic elementary school enrollment trends within these dioceses?
- 3.) What are the similarities and differences in the strategic plans used by these dioceses that are addressing their Catholic elementary school enrollment trends?

Definition of Terms

Catholic elementary school – private school under the jurisdiction of their own Catholic Church servicing grades K to 8

Strategic plan - the process of determining what an organization intends to be in the future and how it will get there. It can best be described as developing a vision for the future of an organization (Barry, 1986).

Diocese - the territorial jurisdiction of a bishop (Merriam-Webster.com, 2012).

Catholic education leaders - Bishop, Superintendent, Principals, Committees on Education

Limitations

Catholic Dioceses within the United States have been forthcoming in the publishing of their strategic plans for Catholic elementary education. These plans are the product of a strategic planning process held within their diocese. The process whereby these plans have been developed is rarely shared with the public. The end product of these processes is what this study will examine, are not the process whereby those plans were decided upon.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Weathering the Storm

The decline in Catholic school enrollment was halted and reversed in the 1990's. However, beginning in 2000 the earlier trend of decline has re-emerged and has continued since. From 2000 to 2009, Catholic school enrollments decreased by over 17 percent from 2.65 million students to 2.19 million students, with a loss of 460,000 students in just nine years (McDonald & Schultz, 2009).

“Along with decreases in enrollment, the total number of Catholic schools has declined steadily since the early 1970's , despite new schools being established. The data are disheartening. The dioceses with the largest number of closings of elementary schools since 2000 are: Chicago, Detroit, Newark, and Brooklyn, each with over 40 school closings, and Boston, Philadelphia, Buffalo, St. Louis, and Cleveland, each with over 30 school closings” (DeFiore et al., 2009, pp. 8-9).

“Catholic schools close for a variety of reasons including declining demographics, weak leadership, weak Catholic identity, in fact or perception, academic problems, family financial circumstances, strong competition and the fact that parents don't sufficiently value Catholic education” (DeFiore et al., 2009, pp. 12-13).

“Critical elements for the success of Catholic schools include: effective leadership, enrollment, financial stability, academic quality, Catholic identity and strategic planning. (DeFiore et al., 2009, p. 24).

Hughes' 3'C Framework

Raw data calls for interpretation in order to be meaningful. Quantitative data are useful for research. The usefulness of this original raw data is correlated to the depth that it is analyzed. The three main categories of analysis are descriptive, comparative and summative (Class notes, Hughes, 2010). One manner of examining these three levels of analysis are Hughes' "5-C's" which were expanded upon in School Based Data Analysis EDU 5650, held at the Oakdale campus of St. John's University. The 5-C's are: Content, Compare, Contrast, Context and Construct (Hughes, 2010). Content deals with the mining of data and it asks the questions, what do we have and what do we need. Compare deals with data analysis and the relationships between various pieces of data. Contrast aids us in asking where do we stand based upon the analysis of the relationships between the data. Context deals with data synthesis and root causes. It asks, why are we here. Finally, Construct deals with framing the problem. It asks how we move on from here. It allows for data driven decision making (Hughes, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The following figure illustrates Hughes' 5 – C's Framework and the major questions that each area seeks to investigate.

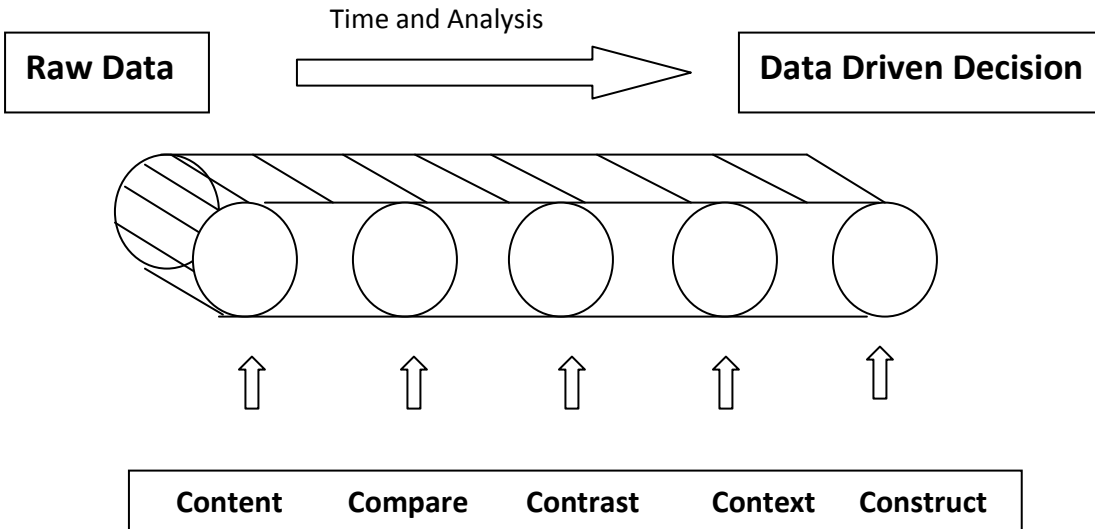
Figure 2.1 Hughes' 5-C's

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• – Content• – Compare• – Contrast• – Context• – Construct	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do we have?• Where do we stand?• Where do we stand?• Why are we here?• How do we move forward?
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Conceptual Framework

The following figure illustrates Hughes’s 5-C’s Framework in a conceptual manner. It may aid the researcher in understanding the process whereby raw data is mined to allow for data based decision making.

Figure 2.2 Hughes’ 5-C’s



Chapter 3

Methodology

Setting

The setting for our research is Catholic dioceses across the United States that have Catholic elementary school populations that are declining at a rate more precipitously than the corresponding demographic data, from the United States Census for the same age group.

The following table illustrates the dioceses that were examined in this study and basic demographic information. The reader may use this table in order to better understand the setting of each diocese for the year 2008.

Table 3.1

Basic Demographic Information of Dioceses Studied

Diocese	Type of Diocese	Size of Diocese	Number of Elementary Schools
Detroit	Archdiocese	1.4 million	80
NYC	Archdiocese	2.4 million	175
Rockville Centre	Diocese	1.4	53
Charlotte	Diocese	450,000	16

Note: Adapted from data presented in the *Catholic Almanac*.

Subjects

In examining the strategic plans used by various dioceses, certain key educational leaders have repeatedly surfaced as the subjects of our study. These subjects were not the only contributors to the strategic plans but were identified as contributors identified by each diocese, based upon the strategic plans published by each diocese.

The following chart illustrates the educational leaders in each of the dioceses studied.

Table 3.2

Educational Leaders in the Dioceses Studied

Diocese	Personnel	Level
Detroit	Bishop	Diocesan
	Superintendent	Diocesan
	Principals	School
NYC	Bishop	Diocesan
	Superintendent	Diocesan
	Education Commission	Various
Rockville Centre	Bishop	Diocesan
	Superintendent	Diocesan
	Education Commission	Various
Charlotte	Bishop	Diocesan
	Principals	School

Note. Adapted from strategic plans submitted by each of the dioceses studied

Data Collection Techniques

In order to determine which Catholic dioceses in the United States saw a decline in enrollment in Catholic elementary schools between 2004 and 2008, that was greater than the demographic shift in the same diocese the Catholic Almanac between the years 2004 and 2008, were gleaned in order to recreate a database of Catholic elementary school enrollment. In addition, a database of Catholic elementary school enrollment. In addition the U.S. Census was then used to determine general enrollment trends for the same two years. The percentage change in Catholic population was compared to the percentage change in the general population.

In order to determine what Catholic school elementary school leaders are using to address the Catholic elementary school enrollment trends within their dioceses the published strategic plans for each diocese were examined. Major areas of the strategic plans were coded and the various plans were compared and contrasted based upon this coding.

Data Analysis Techniques

The percent of change in the Catholic elementary population between the years 2004 and 2008 were cataloged along with the same information for the general population. The differences between the Catholic rate of change and the general population rate of change were determined and ranked in descending order. This allowed for the determination which dioceses would be studied.

The strategic plans for each of these dioceses were broken down into their major components. Each of these components was coded. Based upon this coding, the strategic plans were compared and contrasted.

Summary

This is a quantitative study which may help to understand how various Catholic dioceses are reacting to demographic shifts within their own dioceses.

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