

**THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR:  
USING TACIT ASSUMPTIONS TO PROMOTE HUMAN DIGNITY**

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The discussion about the meaning and intended results of education is a conversation that must be undertaken frequently by all stakeholders in the educational process. One of these conversation partners is the Catholic school system. As in the public school sector, the question of school mission is taking place among leaders in the parochial system. Within our current context of high stakes testing and school accountability, today's Catholic school leaders are also working to provide a clear vision of education in their school mission and practice that relates to core beliefs about life and the human person. Although differing in many considerable ways, leaders from both public and separate school systems can delve deeper into the dialogue of educational mission by sharing what is valued within each system's context, and by reflecting on the practices of the other. The purpose of this article is to invite those interested in the social mission of education to consider the perspective of Catholic education in order to continue discussion and debate about the role and meaning of education. Specifically, this paper will attempt to articulate how school administrators might use reflection on tacit assumptions as a means to promote human dignity within their school communities.

In order to articulate the mission of Notre Dame College, Canadian educator Fr. Athol Murray wrote a poem entitled "The Notre Dame Man." As founder and visionary of the school, Murray illustrated the mission by describing the person he desired to form through his college. In the conclusion to his poem, Murray (2008) described his graduates by stating that,

Not only will they be better prepared to fulfil their duties as a citizen, they should make a better friend, a better husband, a better father, a better wife, because free people do.

They will, in short, be better prepared to live, and when their hour comes, they will know better how to die because free people do.

Although it would be mistaken to conclude that academic excellence was not important to Murray, it is significant that his vision for the educational output of his institution did not include any reference to academic achievement. Rather, he focused entirely on the graduate's character. For Murray, education was not about *what* you became, but about *who* you became. The poem was, in essence, an attempt to answer the question of what is the meaning of education. This question is not new and is not easily resolved. However, the discussion about the meaning and intended results of education is a conversation that must be undertaken frequently by all stakeholders in the educational process. Even for administrators within the public school system, one of these valuable conversation partners is the Catholic school system. As in the public school sector, the question of school mission is taking place among leaders in the parochial system. As did Murray, today's Catholic school leaders are struggling to provide a clear vision of human formation in their school mission and practice that relates to core beliefs about the human person. Although differing in many considerable ways, leaders from both public and separate school systems can delve deeper into the dialogue of educational mission by sharing what is valued within each system's context, and by reflecting on the practices of the other. The purpose of this article is to invite those interested in the social mission of education to consider the perspective of Catholic education as a conversation partner in order to continue discussion and debate about the role and meaning of education.

It is my contention that one of the most significant responsibilities of a school administrator is to focus on *who* the students are becoming. The type of person being formed in schools takes precedence over the type of employment that person will ultimately perform.

Rather than eventual occupation, the focus in Catholic education ought to be lifelong vocation, in particular the fundamental calling to love God and neighbour. Professor of theology and education, Thomas Groome (1998) illustrates this vision when he states, “Consider the worthiest purpose of education as that learners become fully alive human beings who help to create a society that serves the common good” (p. 36). Although the religious motivation for carrying out this vision may be at variance for many, the focus establishing social conditions that allow for a more just and equitable society will be attractive to many. A focus on the common good of all people, however, can only rest upon a foundation that aims to promote human dignity (*Gaudium et spes*). A focus on the moral development of students does not diminish the academic rigour of Catholic educational institutions. In fact, a Catholic vision of the human person provides educators with motivation to form the mind, the body, and the soul of each student.

In addition to the other very important educational outcomes, Catholic administrators should keep the concept of human formation as a major focus of their work because of their abiding belief that there is more to life than academic or material success. This is a perspective that may be attractive to people of a variety of religious perspectives, as well as those with no religious perspective. The very meaning of education, as well as the desired outcomes of learning, therefore, must also take into account the spiritual, rather than only the academic formation of students within Catholic schools. Although speaking to parents about the formation of their children, the words of educator James Stenson (2007) seem quite fitting. He writes, “Your children will not grow up when they can take care of themselves. They will really and truly grow up only when they can take care of others— and want to” (p. 20). Surely Catholic educators like Groome, Murray, and Stenson place great value in intellectual outputs of education.

However, their vision of the human person that derives from their faith leads them to envision a deeper meaning to education.

Although articulating the goals of Catholic education in any thorough manner would require much more detail and nuance, it must suffice to say that Catholic educators must include the spiritual formation of students when determining the mission and goals of their institutions. Specifically, within this formation, the principle of respect for the dignity of all human life should be paramount. This paper will attempt to articulate how Catholic administrators might use the concept of tacit assumptions as a means to promote a core belief in human dignity within their school communities. Using research on how tacit assumptions function within school cultures, I hope to illuminate a path for Catholic administrators to travel, which if taken, will infuse this basic core value within their schools. This will be accomplished by a description of school culture and tacit assumptions which will then be followed by an analysis on how administrators might use culture and tacit assumptions to promote a culture that is distinct in its tacit assumptions in favour of human dignity.

## **Tacit Assumptions**

### *School Culture*

Before arriving at an understanding of how Catholic administrators can use tacit assumptions within their schools to promote human dignity, it will be important to define tacit assumptions. Before tacit assumptions are defined, it will serve us to understand how these assumptions relate to school culture. When speaking of culture, Ouchi (2003) defers to an anthropological understanding. He defines culture as, “a community’s unspoken traditional ways of doing things” (p.247). When describing culture, Hoy & Miskel (2008) offer three levels of

meaning. They speak of culture as shared norms, as shared beliefs and values, and shared tacit assumptions.

By shared norms, Hoy & Miskel (2008) mean that within an organization there are “unwritten and informal expectations that occur just below the surface of an experience” (p. 178). These unwritten rules are somewhat visible and can be exemplified in the type of dress code expected of school staff, as well as expectations in regards to how to discipline students. Shared values are simply defined by Hoy & Miskel (2008) as “beliefs of what is desirable” (p.179). Individuals within an organization would quickly learn whether they are to collaborate or compete with others based on the value of cooperation within the organization. Finally, tacit assumptions refer to the deep core questions that people answer based on how they see truth, the world, themselves, and others. For Hoy & Miskel (2008), norms, values and assumptions are three levels that help to provide an understanding of culture. Additionally, Hoy & Miskel (2008) describe various functions of culture. They assert that culture defines boundaries, provides identity, facilitates commitment, enhances stability, binds a group, and provides standards of behaviour.

When dealing specifically with school culture, Hoy & Miskel (2008) assert that research is “sparse” (p. 186). However, they do proffer some characteristics of effective school cultures, as well as a framework that many schools use to express culture. For these authors, stories, myths, legends, icons, and rituals are the means by which schools express their core values and pass on school culture to others. Ouchi (2003) also asserts that one is able to see how school culture is communicated through visible means. He states that, “We learn what the culture of a school is by watching how the people in it actually behave, not by reading a set of rules about

how they are supposed to behave” (p. 247). In other words, a school culture is best known by living within it, rather than by reading its core documents.

Like Ouchi, Sergiovanni (2000) agrees that culture cannot be grasped by reading a school’s handbook. Sergiovanni goes to an even deeper level to describe school culture. He holds that school culture is about shared visions, values, and beliefs, and he defines school culture as the “normative glue that holds a particular school together” (p. 1). Additionally, for Sergiovanni, culture has specific functions within a school. School culture:

- Provides norms that govern the way people interact
- Serves as a compass- steering people in a common direction
- Provides a framework for deciding what does and does not make sense
- Expresses common understandings
- Deals with values and beliefs
- Expresses needs, purposes, and desires of people
- Provides meaning and deep satisfaction

Similar to Ouchi, Sergiovanni distinguishes the actual lived culture of a school from the rules that do not necessarily express shared values, and may not actually guide behaviour. Following the thought of Husserl and Habermas, Sergiovanni distinguishes the “lifeworld” of a school (culture and meaning) from the “systemsworld” (system of management). The systemsworld may manage efficiency and productivity, but the world of culture offers meaning, guides behaviour, and provides direction. Culture is so important for Sergiovanni (2000), that when it is weak, the consequences are dire. He states, “As culture wanes in a school, meaning is lost, traditions are ruptured, and parents, teachers, and students are likely to drift off in a sea of apathy and indifference” (p. 14).

### *Tacit Assumptions*

Now that a brief description of school culture has been offered, it will be helpful to investigate what tacit assumptions are, and how they relate to school culture. As mentioned above, Hoy & Miskel (2008) designate tacit assumptions as one level of culture. Not only do they classify it as a level of culture, but they go so far as to state, “At its deepest level, culture is the collective manifestation of tacit assumptions. When members of an organization share a view of the world around them and their place in that world, culture exists” (p. 181). Tacit assumptions might be best described as the underlying framework or interpretive structures that we use to understand most things around us. Imel (2003) adds that knowledge at the tacit level can be either consciously known, or somewhat unknown to the person. She also explains that this type of knowledge can be brought from the unconscious to the conscious level. An individual, for example, can become aware, and become able to articulate her taken for granted view of the purpose of education. Borrowing from W.G. Dyer, Hoy & Miskel, (2008) define tacit assumptions as, “abstract premises about the nature of human relationships, human nature, truth, reality, and environment” (p. 181). How a person views the meaning and purpose of human life itself may exist at this level of assumptions. Hoy & Miskel (2008, pp. 181-182) offer five valuable characteristics of tacit assumptions. Tacit assumptions are:

- Developed by an organization as it interacts with its environment
- Considered to be valid and true
- Communicated and taught to others
- Taken for granted
- Difficult to change

An example might serve to illustrate what tacit assumptions are and how people can be encouraged to examine them. In his recent article “Why go to school?” Steven Wolk (2007) attempted to question numerous deeply held educational beliefs that many people carry at the

level of tacit assumptions and, therefore, presuppose as valid. Before offering a framework to construct a new system of education, Wolk forcefully challenged many of the tacit assumptions held by our current educational and economic systems using a critical change perspective. While doing so he questioned taken for granted truths, such as the value of homework, and whether educational outputs ought to be linked to economic goals. Doing so, Wolk (2007) asks readers to consider seriously the fundamental assumptions they have about the purpose of education. Wolk illustrates this by asking readers to reconsider their assumptions when he asserts, “We must deeply question the schools and curricula we have; we must ask what it means to be educated and what it means to be human” (p. 650). Although the meaning of education is hotly debated within educational circles, some people carry their beliefs about these topics at the tacit level. Many of these beliefs remain at the tacit level because ideas about education (or truth or life) are frequently assumed to be true without question and because they have been passed along from others we trust. Leithwood (1999) for example, describes the acquisition of tacit knowledge as “informal and implicit... in most domains of practice” (p. 43). Wolk was asking readers to examine their tacit assumptions in order to critique various attributes of culture that he views as threatening educational institutions. Wolk also raises a very important issue with his article. Although tacit knowledge oftentimes exists at a subconscious level, Wolk is asking us to review, and critically engage our tacit assumptions. Although Hoy & Miskel (2008) describe these assumptions as difficult to change, this is the place where culture is formed, where bias rests, and where indifference hides.

Tacit assumptions, therefore, are a particular level of culture that provides a framework for understanding and interpreting what we experience. They provide meaning, are learned by our various interactions with others, and are assumed to be true. Further, tacit assumptions help

to build and identify cultures and bring people together in a common task when they are shared by groups. Hoy & Miskel (2008) explain that “When organizations develop consistent and articulate patterns of basic assumptions, they have strong cultures” (p. 181). Now that a general understanding of tacit assumptions and their relationship to culture has been proffered, we will apply this knowledge to Catholic school administration.

## **Catholic Leadership**

### *Our Current Situation*

The issues raised by Wolk (2007) are very significant. We must constantly ask ourselves, why we are sending our children to school. We should also ask what schooling should accomplish, and what outputs should be expected of schools. These questions are shared by all schools, public and private. Catholic school leaders, therefore, should be reading the “signs of the times” (*Gaudium et spes*, # 4) and should be responding to the needs of the world and Church in regards to educational mission. It does not take much searching to discover that there are serious and enduring needs and problems in the world. A cursory look at even modern history paints a very bleak picture. Many people, with and without religious perspectives look at the state of human life (and our relationship to our environment) as ruptured. Researcher Rudolph Rummel (1994) studied the accounts of government sponsored mass murder and genocide and has estimated the number at *one-hundred and fifty one million* in the last century alone. This number does not reflect those killed in international warfare. This number, along with our current capacity (and frequent willingness) to destroy so many of the world’s people through war and terrorism demonstrates a shocking situation where contempt for the value of human life has been all too pervasive. One could continue to list the offences against life, from the many

continued ethnic, racial, and religious conflicts, the situations of the world's extreme poor when seen in the context of the world's rich, the exploitation of people through a slave trade that continues uninterrupted, to the disregard for the unborn, elderly, disabled, and prisoners, who, in many places as seen only as a waste of time, money, or resources. The underlying issue at stake in all of these examples is a lack of respect of human dignity. In each situation, greed, convenience, power, ideology, and lust all trump the inherent value of human life.

### *The Catholic Response*

Unfortunately, the Catholic response to these issues has not always been forthright in word or deed. Not only do many Catholics remain indifferent to the plight of the needy, the many instances of sexual and physical abuse within the ranks of its own clergy (and certainly among its own laity as well) have been a reminder of the failures of individual Catholics and institutional Catholicism. However, in direct contrast to the multitude of poor examples in word and deed, there has been a constant and sustained response in terms of the body of writings that have come to be known as Catholic Social Teaching (CST) that calls Catholics to respect the dignity and value of all human life and appeals to followers to take an active role in the work of justice, peace, and reconciliation. These principles bring out some of the best in religious practice and are shared by many outside of organized religion as well.

In a certain respect, all CST can be viewed as an organized and systematic response to the biblical injunction to love one's neighbour as one's self (Luke 10:27). However, as an organized body of writings that addresses the specific needs and challenges of the modern world, there is a formal beginning in Leo XIII's 1891 *Rerum novarum*. Since then, there have been more than ten key documents from the Vatican, as well as contributions made on national levels

by bishop's conferences and local levels by individual bishops. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2008) provides a helpful overview of CST and offers the following key themes as a summary:

- All human life possesses dignity and must be respected at all times.
- The human person is social and finds fulfillment in community.
- Human beings have specific rights; therefore there is a responsibility to make sure these rights are being met.
- We must have a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable.
- The rights and dignity of workers must be met and the economy must serve life.
- We are all united in solidarity as one human family.
- We must be responsible caretakers of the planet and our resources

Although each of these principles is an important element of CST and many of these attitudes are interconnected, human dignity is described by the US bishops as “the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching.” Particularly in his encyclical *The gospel of life* (1995), John Paul II affirmed that respect for human life is not an optional appendage to the Christian life. Rather, he explains that, “The gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus’ message” (# 1). Indeed, when reflecting on the Decalogue’s commandment to not kill, John Paul II (1995) explains that “the deepest element of God’s commandment to protect human life is the requirement to show reverence and love for every person and the life of every person” (# 41). Additionally, the principle of human dignity is the basis of John Paul II’s assertion that all people interrelated and interdependent. In his encyclical *On social concern* (1987), John Paul II encourages readers to move beyond self-interest and indifference to the needs of others. Rather, he asserts that our response to the needs of others is “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” (# 38). When compared to contemporary approaches to socio-political questions, it is important to note the framework from which CST has evolved. Rather than advancing an programme that derives solely from liberal or conservative thought, CST applies

the principles of human dignity and solidarity to all issues, thus, moves beyond a typical liberal versus conservative divide. Although a brief analysis of his work on human dignity, it is important to highlight the work of John Paul II as symbolic of the Church's desire to promote human life and dignity.

In addition to the brief overview of John Paul II's work, there are two other writers who offer penetrating insight into the Catholic response to the state of human dignity. Philosopher and social critic John Kavanaugh offers readers a classic defence of human life. In his *Following Christ in a consumer society* (2006), Kavanaugh distinguishes between two cultures that are trying to form our tacit assumptions by indoctrinating us in their ideology. He holds that all people in our Western society are touched by this pervasive perspective. The first culture he describes is the "commodity form" or the "consumer society." In this society we are raised to see human life (via our tacit assumptions) as a commodity to be bought and sold, used and discarded. Kavanaugh (2006) explains that, "The Consumer Society is a formation system: it informs us as to our identity and to the status of the world" (p.4). Kavanaugh explains that through our formation in the commodity form, we become educated to believe tacitly that life has no ultimate value. People are ranked in value based on what they can produce, and in particular, what they can consume. Kavanaugh (2006) adds that we have been cultured to believe that "If you are unproductive you are useless, worthless. You are unwanted, whether you be one of the economically poor, a starving Bengali, a death-row criminal, or a bothersome five-month fetus" (p. 40). Kavanaugh (2006) gets to the heart of the matter when he explains the result of the commodity form. He states, "What this means in effect is that there is no intrinsic human uniqueness or irreplaceable value. The person *is* insofar as he or she is marketable or productive" (p. 40). A final quote by Kavanaugh (2006) about the commodity form will make what has been

said so far beyond clear. The commodity perspective trains us to see others as things. When speaking of the type of educational and spiritual formation we attain from the commodity form, he says,

We become expert not in the power of a relationship, or in life-giving love, but in the spurious power of force, violence, and self-defence. Terrified at the thought of obsolescence to which we as things are condemned, we perceive our lives as conflict, as competition with other person-things or nation things. We feel we must make ourselves invulnerable before the threat of the other, who might overcome or replace us. Manipulative control, domination, and technique become our trust and allies. People are produced. People are marketed. People are consumed. (p. 65)

In contrast to the commodity form, Kavanaugh offers the “personal form” as a method of protecting and promoting human dignity. Using this perspective, which he formulates from scriptural narratives of the life of Jesus, Kavanaugh provides a Christian cultural framework and asks us to examine critically our tacit assumptions. In particular, he assists the reader in analysing his or her life for traces of the commodity form and helps the reader to make explicit the core assumptions held concerning human life. By the “personal form,” Kavanaugh (2006) means,

A mode of perceiving and valuing men and women as irreplaceable persons whose fundamental identities are fulfilled in covenantal relationships. A covenantal relationship is a mutual commitment of self-donation between free beings capable of self-conscious reflection and self-reflection. (p. 75)

Not only does this reinforce a framework that embraces human dignity, it enables individuals to reorient themselves to the gospel of life by making a clear and explicit choice in regards to their tacit assumptions. In other words, Kavanaugh is laying the foundation of a culture of life.

In addition to Kavanaugh’s work, Canadian philosopher, Jean Vanier has made a remarkable contribution to Catholic thought on the dignity of all human life. Vanier, well known as the founder of L’Arche, a community comprised of people with and without developmental disabilities, has likewise articulated a response to the current culture that promotes the life of

even the most vulnerable and weak among us. In his *Becoming Human* (1998), Vanier powerfully argues that it is when we accept our own weakness and vulnerability, and when we accept the weakness and vulnerability of others, that we are truly learning to be human. Vanier (1998) explains, “Those who are weak have great difficulty finding their place in our society. The image of the ideal human as powerful and capable disenfranchises the old, the sick and the less-abled. For me, society must, by definition, be inclusive of the needs of all of its members...” (p. 45). Like Kavanaugh, Vanier argues for us to re-examine the taken for granted assumptions that seem to be formed within us by the commodity form. Spending his life working with those who find themselves most rejected by society has allowed Vanier to see the need for a society based on the fundamental principle of human dignity. Taken together, John Paul II, Kavanaugh, and Vanier provide an overview of the Catholic perspective of human dignity and a response to the many threats to human dignity in our world. Each of these authors provides insight into the vision of CST and its articulation on how human life must be defended and protected. Our attention will now turn to the question of how to promote this vision in Catholic school cultures using tacit assumptions.

### **Catholic School Culture and Tacit Assumptions**

It is difficult to express what is meant by Catholic school culture. There are so many Catholic schools around the globe that educate students from diverse nationalities and religions from preschool to Ph.D. Is it possible then to define a culture that is particular to Catholic schools? My answer is no. It is not possible to explain the great diversity that makes up the Church and neither is it possible to describe what makes all of these schools unique. Many schools have different missions as well as vastly diverse populations of students, teachers, and

administrators. Instead of attempting to provide an overview of Catholic school culture, a brief discussion about the mission of Catholic education will be offered, followed by a framework that can be used to promote the issue fundamental to Catholic culture, namely, human dignity.

In order to gain an understanding of the mission of Catholic schools, one would turn to official statements from the Vatican dealing with Catholic school and Catholic education. Several important documents deriving from the Congregation for Catholic Education address the mission of Catholic education from a universal perspective (related to the worldwide church, not one specific region). Of these, “The Catholic school” (1979) most clearly articulates the mission of the Catholic school as being identical to the mission of the church itself. In one respect, this means, simply, that Christ is the mission of the Catholic school, since proclaiming the salvation of Christ can be described as the mission of the church in the most specific sense. The Congregation for Catholic Education (1977) explains,

The Catholic school is committed thus to the development of the whole man, since in Christ, the Perfect Man, all human values find their fulfilment and unity. Herein lies the specifically Catholic character of the school. Its duty to cultivate human values in their own legitimate right in accordance with its particular mission to serve all men has its origin in the figure of Christ. He is the One Who ennoble man, gives meaning to human life, and is the Model which the Catholic school offers to its pupils. (#35)

At its essence, sharing Christ with the world is the reason Catholic schools exist. Catholic schools are defined as places that foster love of God, encourage love and service of others, and where one comes to recognize one’s own dignity. Although too vast to summarize effectively, the core documents on Catholic education describe the mission of schools in five other important ways. Catholic schools are places where there is:

- The formation of the whole person (mind, body, soul)
- Respect for the relationship between faith and reason
- A link between faith and the transformation of culture
- A connection between one’s faith and actions

- A profound respect for, and experience of communion with others

Although a brief overview of the mission of the Catholic school, one can see the vision provided by the Vatican, and can also see what is shared, and also what values distinguish Catholic schools from other school systems. This understanding will move us into the next section of the paper, namely, that Catholic school administrators may use tacit assumptions to promote a culture of respect for each individual. The tacit assumptions I employ when I offer the idea of tacit assumptions as a method to promote respect for human dignity will help the reader understand where we will go from here. First, I hold that a Catholic school ought to be a place where discipleship of Jesus is the school's reason for being. Secondly, as already mentioned I hold that human dignity is a core value of the Catholic Christian faith. Since it seems that the lack of respect for human dignity is behind much of the ills of the world, I propose that one of the most essential duties of a Catholic school administrator is to create a culture of respect. This respect for the dignity of life will be the basis for active and continued service to others throughout the whole of one's life. Finally, I see tacit assumptions as a useful vehicle for administrators to use to engage themselves, students and teachers in building respect for human dignity. No matter what other goals, intended output, or particular mission a school may have; it *must* work to promote and defend the dignity of all people.

As Ouchi (2003) explained above, culture reflects an unspoken way of doing things. Hoy & Miskel (2008) agree when they speak of the shared norms within a culture. In Catholic school culture, the shared norms and informal expectations must guide behaviour in order to reflect the inherent dignity of each student, teacher, administrator, staff member, and visitor to the school (as well as those each member will come to meet throughout life). No matter what else is important to the school, respect for each individual must be the primary shared norm and

principle guiding behaviour. It is very interesting that in his apostolic constitution *Ex corde ecclesiae*, John Paul II (1996) spoke of human dignity nine times. The document, which addressed the meaning and mission of Catholic universities, placed great emphasis on the culture that is promoted in these institutions. When speaking of the basic academic activities of a university, John Paul II (1996) asserts that its teaching must take place in a context that “forms men and women capable of rational and critical judgment and conscious of the transcendent dignity of the human person...” (# 49). Thus, it is directly within the mission of a Catholic institution of learning that students are formed and become aware of the dignity and transcendent nature of all human life.

Likewise, Hoy & Miskel (2008) speak of the shared values that exist within an organization. These shared values teach people in the organization what is desirable. Hodgkinson (1991) also speaks of organizational values in terms of what is good and right. In regards to Catholic school culture, we might put particular emphasis on developing values of right action as well as right motives. This means striving to create a framework that promotes an intellectual respect the human person, while also fostering lived praxis that reflects this value in behaviour. It does no good, in other words, to learn to respect life while never practicing it as lived action. Thus, within Catholic schools an explicit culture of respect for life must be the foundation for all activities and goals, namely, that students, teachers, staff, and administrators foster a culture that promotes, protects, and recognizes the inherent dignity in all persons.

Although Hoy & Miskel (2008) speak of the difficulty in manipulating cultures in schools, Fullan (2003) provides hope when he articulates how to change context in organizations. Fullan refers to the study of criminologists Wilson and Kelling and their study of the relationship of crime and disorder (in this case- broken glass) in order to advocate for the

possibility of change. Fullan (2003) explains that when there is a change in context, “the set of conditions under which we operate” (p. 27), there can be substantial change to behaviours. In other words, Fullan asserts that if there are small changes to the context (culture) then the behaviours of those within the context will also change. Fullan (2003) explains, “The message for us is don’t treat the context as a given.” Rather, he continues, “Change it, even in small ways, to get new results. If you want more sharing of knowledge, name it as a value, create mechanisms that cause it to happen, and have low tolerance for people who don’t to it” (p. 28). For our study, we might apply the same system in regards to respect. We might model it, as well as name it as a core value, in addition to changing the context of disrespect. This will have to be done through examples and modeling of the behaviour.

In addition to his thoughts on changing the context in order to change behaviour of those within the context, Fullan (2003) also offers a motivational technique that may be practical for Catholic administrators. The goal of promoting human dignity is indeed a lofty goal that is not easy to achieve (if ever achieved). Asking a school to transform its culture to more fully reflect the core values of followers of Jesus is asking people to change habits, and values. What must be done therefore is not only name dignity as a core value, it must be held up as what Fullan (2003) calls a “social attractor” (p. 34). Fullan (2003) explains, “If people believe they are doing something worthwhile of a higher order they may be willing to put in the extra sacrifices and effort” (p. 34). Likewise, in their assessment of transformational leadership, Hoy & Miskel (2008) also describe the importance of inspiring followers to, “transcend their own interests to pursue higher order goals...” (p. 448). The idea of social attractors, as well as inspiring people to seek goals that are greater than themselves is of particular importance to developing a school culture of respect for human dignity. In particular, these two concepts can be employed when

setting administrative goals and when assessing organizational behaviours. If those within a school demonstrate respect for individuals in concrete ways, a school may be developing a culture that respects human dignity. When phrases like “that’s not the way we treat each other around here” are heard, the culture of life is catching hold.

As we have seen, developing a culture of respect for dignity demands that respect for the dignity of all people be a core value. A school will demonstrate success in developing this culture when individuals share tacit assumptions in favour of life. In other words, when people share the assumption that human life is valuable, and they act according to that unspoken value, a school is achieving one of its most fundamental goals. The Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) asserted that Catholic schools had a valuable role to play in the salvific mission of the Church. This reflects the high calling of Catholic education; it is to play a role in the saving mission of Christ. It can do so by taking part in the spiritual formation of all who are involved in its mission. There are several ways that administrators can help students question, reflect upon, and orient their tacit knowledge to share in a vision of respect for life. It is important to note that none of this formation should be done as a means of manipulation. Educators should be open and upfront about student formation and should work to make tacit knowledge understood and chosen. In other words, students should engage in activities (and witness examples) that ask them to develop their respect for life in an explicit manner. It should not be a covert operation.

One of the first things an administrator must do is assemble and inspire a faculty to share the vision that these abstract premises about humanity are true. By doing so, the administrator will allow students to develop the general outlook about the human person and to, likewise, share this vision. The faculty must be willing to exemplify this vision as well. This means that

potential faculty members should be asked about their understanding of the human person and how they would articulate this vision. This assumption that the human person is valuable regardless of gender, race, abilities, economic status, and all other conceivable differences, is what will be shared with students as they are engaged by teachers within the school environment. In practice, teachers must make this “assumption” very explicit and must also use this to correct behaviour. For example, if any member of the school community were to make jokes that insulted any group of people, this person should be corrected and instructed that “we don’t do that sort of thing here.” This vision can be communicated in daily interaction as well as in suitable class projects, service learning, and in the types of role models schools offer to their students and staff. A principal might decide to pass up a more recognized graduation speaker for an individual who has truly embodied CST in his or her life. Hoy & Miskel (2008) describe stories, myths, legends, rituals, and icons as essential elements of school culture. Each of these cultural pieces articulates the core values, beliefs, and tacit assumptions of a school. Because each of these elements of culture can communicate more than spoken words, it is essential that a leader focused on the promotion of dignity through each of these avenues.

Besides assembling a faculty that shares a vision in regards to human worth and practices it in word and deed, school administrators must also attempt to make tacit assumptions more conscious to students and staff. This means that academic work as well as clubs, athletics, and social activities will offer opportunities for students to articulate their core values and be able to explain their once taken for granted assumptions in favour of life. Although tacit assumptions and school culture may be difficult to change, when the context has changed, behaviour will follow. All members of the community should have many opportunities to question what they believe about human life, and be challenged to grow more fully in appreciation of the human

person. Only in this way will individuals have frequent and conscious opportunities to review their tacit assumptions in order to raise their own awareness of what they believe and in order to cultivate respect for all others.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

For the most part, this work has been theory based rather than practical. I hope to conclude this paper with several recommendations to those in Catholic school administration in order to promote the core value of respect for human life. As a general framework, the work of Flecher & Worthen (2007) is quite convincing. After a cross-disciplinary study of human benevolence, they conclude that actively working for the good of others (which flows from a respect for the human dignity of the other) is a result of hard work and training, similar to success in sport or hobbies. Flecher & Worthen (2007) explain “what makes someone good at something is usually his or her desire to be good at that thing – that combined with practice” (p. 250). For administrators to be successful at changing culture through tacit assumptions it will take hard work and practice. The same holds true of teachers and students. Each group will have to work hard and use intentional means of transformation in order to improve school culture and promote human dignity.

First of all, the promotion of human life must be central to the mission of the administration as well as the school. The promotion of respect for dignity must be a clearly articulated goal. If administrators wish to make any difference in the school culture and tacit assumptions of the school community, it has to become their mission and a top priority. Rather than belonging to the systemsworld as described above by Sergiovanni (2000), it must translate directly in the lifeworld of a school. It must be one of the core goals and what drives the day to

day life of the school. If the deeply held conviction that life is important in every situation is not a central issue within the school's vision, it will be soon forgotten or become just a nice slogan. Hoy & Miskel (2008) explain that in order to effectively change culture "Long-term systematic effort is more likely to produce change than short-term fads" (p. 208). In particular, the administration must get teachers on board in order to build this culture and provide the necessary resources to make the goal a reality. Kilmann (1984) provides a helpful research-based strategy for challenging norms (tacit assumptions). Through five steps, teachers are enabled to articulate tacit assumptions, discuss new directions, work to establish new cultural norms, assess gaps in desired culture and actual culture, and then work to diminish gaps between desired and actual. Likewise, Collins (2001) speaks of four ways to build a culture of discipline. This culture is built on concepts of freedom and personal responsibility, it is driven forward by disciplined people, it is not ruled like a dictatorship, and it flourishes when people know their primary goal and stick to it religiously. Additionally, Collins recommends each organization create a "stop doing" list in order to help highlight the central goals. For dignity to become a part of culture, it must be named as a goal, must be a part of strategic planning, and must be a part of all decision making. If the transformation of tacit assumptions is clearly articulated and practiced in daily life of a school as a central goal, progress will be made.

Secondly, administrators ought to try to measure this goal. Although difficult, it is possible to set up specific targets and attempt to gage the success of these goals. Even if there is no hard data to "prove" that students are changing, there are a variety of measurements that can evaluate such elements as how students perceive they are respected. In addition qualitative data can be collected to evaluate guest speakers, programming, or course activities that all relate to promoting life. Likewise, it is easy to count the number of students who take part in optional

service opportunities, initiate their own projects, attend rallies, or other such activities. Most schools use some form of teacher evaluation. Questions that inquire about the incorporation of materials, lessons, and culture building activities can be incorporated into teaching evaluation. In her insightful article on peer assistance and review (PAR), Goldstein (2008) discusses effective ways to improve teacher performance. She asserts that PAR can be a powerful way to transform teaching by using consulting teachers for feedback over extended periods and by linking professional development and evaluation. A method of assessment and review for teachers that incorporates the articulated goal of teaching for dignity is a powerful way to actually assist teachers in meeting this target. If this value is central to the administration, the administration can find meaningful ways to track it and assess the transformation of school culture.

The third recommendation is that respect for human dignity must permeate the whole school community. There can be no element of school life that evades this value. If students only hear this message from some teachers, while others mock it, this core value will lack credibility. Zdenek and Schochor (2007) explain that research on character education programs demonstrates that the whole community must be involved in the program. Otherwise, there are divided school cultures and groups are working against one another. This message must be reinforced across the academic curriculum as well as in student life activities in order to make it part of the culture. As mentioned earlier by Imel (2003) tacit assumptions must be brought to the conscious level. Through intentional practices, and in a manner that fits the specific context of a school, leaders reinforce the worldview that all people possess an inalienable dignity. Respect for the inherent dignity of life should ooze from the school. Projects in a variety of different subjects are able to incorporate role models, principles of CST, and opportunities to practice and experience CST in one's own life. Flecher & Worthen (2007) articulate the importance of

personal experience in formation as they explain “it is with occasions of seeing someone in need—upon *actual experiences* of witnessing a suffering other, that altruists come to feel that they have no choice but to act as they do” (p. 249). Groome (1998) effectively explains this concept when he states, “But consider that if teachers permeate the school and classroom environment with three more R’s—Respect, Responsibility, and Reverence—the ethos may be far more likely to care for souls, without ever using religious language” (p. 355).

Fourthly, some methods of moral leadership are more effective than others. It will be difficult to change school culture with an iron rod. In her research on school leadership and moral literacy, Leonard (2007) found that “force feeding” was not effective (p. 424). Rather, she found that instructional practices such as case studies allowed students to engage in the process of moral evaluation and also enabled students to reflect upon their own beliefs and practices (p. 424). This practice helped students uncover their own tacit assumptions and also to evaluate them critically. A person in a position of authority in a Catholic school must have standards of behaviour, but must also address these issues in a sensitive and tactful manner. One example of a practice that can be incorporated is an invitation to study works such as those by Vanier, Kavanaugh, and many others that bring our tacit assumptions to the conscious level. Books and discussion groups among faculty and students can provide a context to evaluate their selves and culture in regards to how our weakest members are treated. This type of leadership is described by Morey & Piderit (2006) in their analysis of effective presidents of Catholic universities. They describe “connective presidents” as having three characteristics essential for a cultural transformation. They explain,

First, these presidents carefully assess who and what presently exists within the culture that could positively contribute to achieving their stated goals. Second, the presidents assemble a senior administrative ensemble that reports directly to them and becomes the dominant catalyzing team within the existing culture. Finally,

connective presidents put time and energy into mentoring this group and strategising with them. (p. 276)

Thus, methodology will be important in effectively leading for change. An authoritarian approach will violate the message that the school is a place where one learns of one's own dignity and is invited to accept and act upon a belief in the dignity of all others.

The fifth recommendation is for administrators to use methods that have been effective in terms of academic achievement for moral achievement. Edmonds (1979) describes five factors that are present in effective schools. This model which includes criteria such as strong principal leadership and high teacher expectations can provide concrete guidance for moral and spiritual development. If this is to be an important goal that might be realized within Catholic schools, all methods and resources should be kept at disposal. In addition to methods used in academic achievement, Flecher & Worthen (2007) rightly assert that practices responsible for great success in other domains (sport, the arts) can be incorporated into the practice of living a life of deep respect for others. Leaders, evaluating their own context as explained by Morey & Piderit (2006), will bring about the evaluation of tacit assumptions by embedding activities that meet the needs of their own community. Specifically, within CST, there are key terms that should be learned, understood, and lived (practiced) throughout an academic year. Administrators must become familiar with the full meaning of principles of human dignity, the common good, solidarity, option for the poor, social justice, stewardship, and human rights. These fundamental principles of CST will become goals, common language, and will direct the overall direction of the school culture. These are the standards to guide institutional effectiveness. Finally, students will engage in projects that allow them to experience the impact that their lives can have on others. They will leave school understanding that their participation in transforming the world is not something superfluous; rather, it is an expectation.

The sixth and final recommendation is that the focus on moral development (particularly respect for dignity) does not diminish academic or other goals in the least. While true that any goal may direct time and resources from other objectives, the academic rigor of a school should benefit from an emphasis on how we understand the human person. This message about the goodness of human life and the focus on those who face threats to their dignity can serve as a motivation for students to build community, take responsibility, and live a life of concern for others. None of these characteristics in a student would diminish his or her desire to achieve academic excellence. Addressing this issue, Fullan articulates the relationship between academics and moral development well. His words might act as a fitting conclusion to this section. Fullan (2003) states “to elevate moral purpose is not to downplay knowledge. We are talking about major advances in both moral purpose, and knowledge, indeed synergies therein” (p. 19).

In conclusion, a renewed emphasis must be placed upon building the principles of Catholic Social Thought within Catholic schools. In particular, promoting respect for the dignity of all human life must become a central goal of Catholic administrators. Using school culture and tacit assumptions about the meaning and value of life are specific ways that administrators can engage students to reflect critically on their beliefs and practices in order to facilitate continued growth in this pivotal area. Not only are issues of respect for human dignity central within Catholic school leadership, many schools in the private and public sectors focus on educating for citizenship and social justice. This discussion must be continued if educators hope to create positive change in a problematic world situation. When students become more aware of the dignity of all people they will become more willing to grow up; that is, care for others and want to.

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