

Sorvaag, Scott H. Annotation of “An Examination of the Effectiveness of Formation Programs in Fostering the Values of Lasallian School Culture in Lay Educators in Lasallian Secondary Schools” by Michael Tidd, FSC, Ed.D. diss., University of San Francisco, 2001. *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 4, no. 3 (Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota: 2013).

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ANNOTATION

Tidd, Michael. “An Examination of the Effectiveness of Formation Programs in Fostering the Values of Lasallian School Culture in Lay Educators in Lasallian Secondary Schools.” Ed.D. dissertation, University of San Francisco, 2001, 317 pp.

Michael A. Tidd, FSC, developed the Lasallian School Culture Inventory (LSCI) to survey 239 educators in 47 Lasallian secondary schools in the United States. Brother Michael uses the LSCI to measure articulated core values of Lasallian school culture as a way of determining the effectiveness of Lasallian formation programs in deepening lay educators’ level of commitment to the Lasallian mission. The study reveals “formation programs could not be shown to contribute to a statistically significantly increased commitment to Lasallian values” (315).

The impetus for studying formation of lay teachers in Lasallian schools is clearly described in the historiography of Lasallian schooling in the U.S. since its origin in Baltimore in 1841. The author posits that two central dynamics of the Institute have come to define the current context – the decline in number of vowed Brothers and the growth and sustenance of more than three centuries of mission in engaging learners in quality education with a preference for the poor. Brother Michael illuminates the mid-1960s as a turning point: “The Brothers have come to see that their mission is no longer a task given them by the Church solely for themselves to carry out” (7). Twenty-first-century Lasallian education involves ‘Shared Mission’ supported by Brothers, lay partners, and associates. The context of Lasallian school culture and the importance of a shared commitment to essential values tied to mission is at the core of Brother Michael’s research. He explains, “the desire of the Brothers to ensure the continuity of their institutions’ distinctive spirit, their growing redefinition of their mission as one shared with laypeople, and the desire of their lay colleagues for a deeper sense of themselves as teachers in what were increasingly known as ‘Lasallian Schools’ created the imperative for programs of integral formation” (9).

Brother Michael provides ample background for the study starting with the operative theology of seventeenth-century religious life and the perspective of the Founder who valued keeping the Brothers separate from laypeople as much as possible so as not to weaken their vows or lose their vocation. In serving the full learning, growth, and development of young people, especially the poor, ‘together and by association’ became one of the first and most important vows the Brothers took. Through the years and into the twentieth century, this vow became instrumental in shifting attitudes toward including lay teachers in “Brothers Schools”, even in their change to the label of ‘Lasallian Schools’. Detailing a structured review of General Chapters, convened every seven years, the author outlines the evolution of the Institute including the emerging concept of ‘Lasallian Family’ which began to include ‘full integration of lay teachers’ and ‘formation for lay teachers’ leading to ‘Lasallian Partners’ being called to “take an equal, yet complementary place with the Brothers in execution of the mission” (49). Central to grounding the study was a document titled “Shared Mission” which articulated, among other essential ideas, “All who

espouse the Lasallian Mission are partners in this venture” and “Formation in the Mission is an essential process for all” (52).

School culture, Catholic school culture, and Lasallian school culture are foundational to the author’s review of the literature. Brother Michael also devotes specific attention the characteristics and responsibilities of the Lasallian teacher and to the formation programs to which those teachers are invited. The author defines school culture as the abstract, albeit real, identity of the school and points out that teachers influence and bring school culture to life. He outlines the particular characteristics of Catholic school culture historically focused on the development of a true and perfect Christian enlivened by the “Gospel spirit of freedom and charity” (89). Particular to Lasallian school culture is the emphasis on De La Salle’s life, story, person and vision, which includes the role of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Lasallian schools are characterized by a spirit of faith and zeal: a spirit of faith and the acknowledgement of the presence of God for a full life and a spirit of zeal, the spirit flowing into dedication to working together and by association for the human and Christian education of young people, especially the poor. This educational mission is about salvation – salvation from sin and salvation from want (escape from poverty) and includes integration of religious and secular education characterized by a respect for other religious traditions. A teaching community, working together and by association, is “key to the entire enterprise” (115). The author asserts that ‘association’ implies unity for practical human and Christian education centered on individual student needs for being successful in the world of work, family, and citizenship. Lasallian formation programs, including the Huether Workshop, Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies, Lasallian Leadership Institute, assemblies/convocations, and district formation programs, are designed to develop the diverse needs of the contemporary Lasallian teacher. Brother Michael states that for the mission to continue, Lasallian teachers must be professionally competent, practice Lasallian virtues, individualize based on need, work in association with colleagues, use profound knowledge of students, be self disciplined and with right motivation and intent, and operate with “unselfish disinterestedness and care of each child” (139) with a special affection for the poor and educationally deficient. Lasallian formation programs have been designed to move the institute forward in mission through the work of the emerging population of Lasallian teachers. Thus, the importance of measuring the effectiveness of Lasallian formation programs on Lasallian teachers’ level of commitment to mission.

Given the Lasallian mission and school culture, the increases in numbers of lay Lasallian educators, the declining numbers of Brothers in the U.S., and the emergence of the ‘Shared Mission’ paradigm, Lasallian formation has taken center stage. “Crucial to the advancement of this Shared Mission concept was the creation of programs of training and formation for lay persons who wanted to make a deeper commitment to the Lasallian mission” (157). The researcher designed the LSCI to address the need for research on formation program effectiveness. The population studied was secondary school lay educators in two groups – those who had participated in formation and those who had not. Once measures of reliability and validity had been established, the LSCI was administered to the population of 239 educators. Secondary schools were selected because they make up the majority of Lasallian institutions in the U.S. Approximately half of the 470 educators in Lasallian Secondary schools in the U.S. participated in the study.

The author notes, “The present study was undertaken to investigate the impact of formation programs conducted by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the United States for lay educators in Lasallian secondary schools” (175). The review of the literature answered research questions regarding normative contemporary Lasallian school values, beliefs, and attitudes and expectations for integration of these concepts by Lasallian educators. The literature review also established the nature and scope of Lasallian lay teacher formation programs in the U.S.

Analysis of the data revealed no significant differences in the two groups’ reported level of commitment to mission. Also, “no formation program consistently and strongly emerged as a significant predictor of LVI (Lasallian Values Index) scores for those had participated in formation programs” (197). The elements of effective Lasallian lay educator formation programs were unable to be discerned because of the previous findings. The author concluded, “It seems the Lasallian school culture’s values were more ‘caught than taught’, in that formal exposition of Lasallian cultural concepts and values had less impact on one’s internalization of those values than the cumulative effect of initial interest in learning about Lasallian ideas and values and of working in a Lasallian school and its cultural milieu” (217).

Questions remain. How will the Lasallian mission be forwarded in the minds and hearts of Lasallian educators and those we serve? What elements of effectiveness can be developed and nurtured to increase the impact of local, regional, and international Lasallian formation? How can Lasallians apply the shared dedication to human and Christian education, together and by association, to our own learning and growth into a more enlivened future in shared mission and a fully global family?