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## ANNOTATION

Mann, FSC, William Edward, "The Lasallian School: Where Teachers Assist Parents in the Education and Formation of Children." Brothers of the Christian Schools, LI-NE Province, Inc., Narragansett, RI, 1991.

William Mann's doctoral dissertation at Colgate Rochester Divinity School (1990) offers the reader, through his qualitative, action-based, literature-driven research, a glimpse into the ways in which parents and teachers, school and home might collaborate in Lasallian Schools in order for those schools to achieve their purpose of quality education and formation of their students.

Mann's dissertation, in nine chapters with three appendices (offering outlines of the workshops he developed for parents and teachers) and an extensive bibliography, sets as its purpose: "Parents must participate in any re-visioning of the schools attended by their children....Presented herein is the rationale for just such an involvement of parents and teachers working together to uncover the rich potential that these schools can have in the lives of children" (iii).

The first four chapters deal with the Lasallian School. In the *Introduction*, Mann offers an overview of the life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the Lasallian School movement, and the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents.

Chapter 2 offers a rich but succinct description of the Lasallian School today emphasizing the critical role of the teacher as a parental replacement in the school setting and the relationship of the teacher and student (a kind of mentorship). He writes: "Inviting the young into this new adult, Christian way of being and assisting in the process of the transformation that this shift involves is precisely what the Lasallian school and the teacher in the Lasallian school is all about" (17).

In Chapter 3 Mann presents six characteristics of the Lasallian School: 1. Christian in the Roman Catholic tradition; 2. A curriculum designed to meet the needs of students; 3. Preparation of the student for a productive life and citizenship; 4. Acquisition of Christian values by the student; 5. Use of example (modelling and relationships) as a primary means of instruction; and, 6. A school that is well-run and organized for student growth. Mann summarizes these characteristics by noting that "it is the whole school structure through which we help parents form the young person into this new kind of adult Christian being" (30).

Chapter 4 describes succinctly the history of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Lasallian School post Vatican Council II. Mann emphasizes the role of formation programs for Brothers and lay partners and the burgeoning Lasallian publications that became available for use in those formation programs. He then describes the formation program that he designed to bring teacher and parents together to provide for "a re-examination of the reality of one's own

unique educational community in light of the reality of the rich Lasallian heritage...the workshop was a corrective and hopefully non-intrusive effort to stimulate change” (45). Three such workshops are described in detail in the Appendices with a series of 16 interesting comments from parents to school leaders included.

Chapters 5-8 offer four different perspectives through which one can view the home-school, parent-teacher relationship. All four perspectives promote the necessity of open, honest and substantial relationships between the parents and home of the child and the teachers and school community. The four perspectives are: 1. Family systems; 2. Current educational theory and practice; 3. Catholic teaching on the role of the parent and family; and; 4. Lasallian principles and practices from the origins.

Mann, in Chapter 5, uses a case study to illustrate the impact of family life on school and student behavior, an impact that is driven by interlocking systems and relationships. In particular, Mann notes how family alcoholism has wide-ranging effects on how families deal with problems, how those problems carry over to school behavior, and how schools deal with those problems. Mann states: “Given the complex nature and state of the current American family and given the impact family life has on both learning and behavior, every school needs to incorporate a family perspective in dealing with youngsters” (50) and “Over time, I have come to believe that both school and home are connected by a kind of underground emotional subway system. What is happening in one is often surfacing and playing itself out in the other” (55). Mann concludes by noting that the Lasallian School has always sought to deal with students with the diverse and complex needs that can be identified in the present day.

Chapter 6 outlines the complex societal shifts impacting families (loss of the traditional nuclear family, mobility of families, and youth culture) leading Mann to note that old models of home-school collaboration no longer work. Research has indicated that Catholic schools with strong functional communities surrounding students, i.e. communities that can augment parental resources, have the possibility of offering a stronger educational and formational opportunity to their students. “This social capital, the ‘dense, overlapping and mutually reinforcing relationship patterns,’ is the true richness of the functional community. This social capital is enhanced when principals strengthen the relationships that parents have with other parents, that parents have with the educators, that adults have with the children, who are all part of the same educational community” (87).

In Chapter 7 Mann outlines Roman Catholic teaching on the role of the family in the upbringing of children and the role of parent-teacher collaboration. He notes the necessity of a dialogue between Catholic tradition and teaching and the realities of the present community of believers (96) as a way of further illuminating how schools can best deal with parents and families. This collaboration of school and parents is for Mann “not just a matter of good educational policy or convenience. It is a perspective grounded in the apostolic mission entrusted by God to parents” (103).

Chapter 8 offers a masterful synthesis of the writings of Saint John Baptist de La Salle (particularly *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* and *Meditations*) on the fundamental

relationship of home and school needed if the schools were to be successful and the best interests of the students were to be met.

Mann concludes (Chapter 9) by providing some autobiographical reflections that illustrate the importance of the strong collaboration of teacher and parent, school and family necessary for students to grow to their full potential and “for the young people of our society [to be led] into a warmer and gentler world” (123).

Mann does not offer areas for further inquiry, though one can infer from his description of the workshops that additional attempts must be made by schools to engage parents in analyzing the existing educational environment to see how schools can better meet the needs of students in their family contexts.

Although this dissertation has as its main audience Lasallian elementary, middle and secondary schools, its strong case for school and family partnerships can be extended to post-secondary Lasallian institutions as well. The increasingly complex role of parents in higher education (the so-called “helicopter parents” and the link of parent to college student through social media; the role of parents in the selection of colleges in a highly competitive market) warrants an exploration of the productive role that college/university and parent collaboration might play. In addition, the recent longitudinal research on young people and religious values and practices (Smith & Denton, 2005; Pearce & Denton, 2011; and, Smith & Snell, 2009) opens for Catholic and Lasallian higher education large questions about the role of parents in their children’s religious belief and practices and the role of other significant influences (peer, meaningful communities, American society, etc.) on those beliefs and practices. Can Lasallian colleges and universities offer the “social capital” to provide an environment where their students can grow in wisdom and in faith?

## References

- Pearce & Denton, *A Faith of Their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America’s Adolescents*, Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Smith & Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Smith & Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, Oxford University Press, 2009.