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Slogging and Stumbling Toward Social Justice in a Private Elementary School: The Complicated Case of St. Malachy

By Martin Scanlan

This case study examines St. Malachy, an urban Catholic elementary school primarily serving children traditionally marginalized by race, class, linguistic heritage, and disability. As a private school, St. Malachy serves the public good by recruiting and retaining such traditionally marginalized students. As empirical studies involving Catholic schools frequently juxtapose them with public schools, the author presents this examination from a different tack. Neither vilifying nor glorifying Catholic schooling, this study critically examines the pursuit of social justice in this school context. Data gathered through a 1-year study show that formal and informal leaders in St. Malachy adapted their governance, aggressively sought community resources, and focused their professional development to build the capacity to serve their increasingly pluralistic student population. The analysis confirms the deepening realization that striving toward social justice is a messy, contradictory, and complicated pursuit, and that schools in both public and private sectors are allies in this pursuit.

Students in poverty, of color, with disabilities, or who are English-language learners are underserved by schools (Berliner, 2005; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Losen & Welner, 2001; Orfield & Lee, 2005). When educating 10% of students at the elementary and secondary levels, private schools enroll relatively few such “traditionally marginalized” students (Alt & Peter, 2002; Broughman & Swaim, 2006; Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2007; Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2007). As the population of children in the United States grows more heterogeneous (Snyder et al., 2007), trends toward homogeneity in private school enrollment exacerbate stratification in our nation’s educational sectors.

The case study presented in this article presents an exception to such trends by examining a private elementary school that strives to reduce barriers to traditionally marginalized students. With the unit of analysis as the school, this study answers the question: How does a private school community promote inclusivity as it experiences accelerating degrees of diversity across multiple dimensions? As a school community, St. Malachy successfully recruits and retains significant numbers of children marginalized by issues of poverty, racism, class, and disability. Yet instead of serving as an exemplar, this study confirms the deepening realization that leadership promoting social justice is often messy and contradictory (Author, 2006c;

Theoharis, 2007). Neither glorifying nor demonizing St. Malachy in particular, or Catholic schooling in general, this study enriches our understanding of the complexities of a private marginalized students.

Private Schools Serving the Public Good

Compared to their public counterparts, schools in the private sector underserve traditionally marginalized students (Broughman & Swaim, 2006; Strizek et al., 2007). Disproportionately few students of color enroll in private schools: Although students of color comprise 42% of public school enrollment (Snyder et al., 2007), there is only 24% of enrollment in private schools (Broughman & Swaim, 2006). Similar patterns apply to other dimensions of diversity. More than 1 in 10 (13%) students have diagnosed disabilities and service delivery plans in public schools, which, in comparison, measures to less than 1 in 20 (4%) students in private schools (Strizek et al., 2007). In addition, 11% of students in public schools are English-language learners, yet such students comprise only 6% of private school enrollments (Strizek et al., 2007).

Private schools fail to serve the public good to the degree that they exclude traditionally marginalized students. Yet among private schools, select Catholic schools are relatively inclusive. In general, Catholic schools are both more affordable and more likely to be located in urban areas with higher concentrations of traditionally marginalized students (Alt & Peter, 2002; Cattaro, 2002). Catholic education are also compelled by Catholic social teachings, which emphasize human dignity, the common good, and a preferential option for the marginalized (Curran, 2002; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004; Storz & Nestor, 2007), to welcome all students and reduce barriers to those who have been disadvantaged (Author, in press-b; Barton, 2000; Long & Schuttloffel, 2006; U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998, 2002b). Extant literature on how Catholic schools educate traditionally marginalized students often focuses on climate and academic programs in these schools (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Cibulka, O'Brien, & Zewe, 1982; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Convey, 1992; Hoffer, Greeley, & Coleman, 1985; Jeynes, 2002; Sandor, 2001a, 2001b) or on how these schools serve specific subsets of students, such as African Americans (McGreevy, 1996; Moore, 2003; York, 1996), Latinos (Carger, 1996; Stevens-Arroyo & Pantoja, 2003), or students with disabilities (Author, in press-a; Barton, 2000; Lawrence-Brown & Muschaweck, 2004; Long, Brown, & Nagy-Rado, 2007; Owens, 2005; Powell, 2004; Preimesberger, 2000; U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002a). Select Catholic schools operationalize Catholic social teachings (CST) through innovative structures that allow them to serve significant numbers of traditionally

marginalized students (Anderson, 2002; Author, 2008; Nativity Miguel Network, 2007; O'Keefe et al., 2004; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998; Preimesberger, 2000; Shields, 2002).

Educating traditionally marginalized students is a core way that Catholic schools can contribute to the public good. Yet this practice has waned in recent decades. Changing personnel, governance, and financing structures have left Catholic schools increasingly dependent on tuition and with poorly developed systems to deliver bilingual and special education services (Baker & Riordan, 1998, 1999; Gray & Gautier, 2006; McGreevey, 2003; O'Keefe, 1996; Youniss & McLellan, 1999). In particular, Catholic elementary schools situated in urban areas fraught with socioeconomic instability are an endangered species (O'Keefe et al., 2004; O'Keefe & Murphy, 2000). Within this context, the schools such as St. Malachy provide counternarratives to what has been called the "eliting" of Catholic schools (Baker & Riordan, 1998).

Praxis of Catholic Social Teachings

I employed a conceptual framework that focused on the praxis of CST for studying this case. Praxis signifies blending theory with action. I ground my understanding of praxis in the Freirian description of conscientization. According to St. John (1999), Freire's concept of conscientization is the process by which people "achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality" (p. 85). Conscientization is characterized by critical consciousness that prompts efforts to transform oppressive social structures (Roberts, 2000). Roberts describes this symbiotic relationship between conscientization and praxis as follows: "Conscientization and praxis [are] necessarily intertwined—Conscientization is the reflective dimension of praxis—when one engages in praxis, one is of necessity being conscientized. Conscientization occurs in the transforming moment where critical reflection is synthesized with action" (p. 146).

Freire (1973) held that freedom from the domesticating influences of oppression "can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 36). Though trends show most Catholic schools make gestures to serve traditionally marginalized students, offering a token amount of financial scholarship, for instance, few undergo the struggle to redesign themselves, to fundamentally eliminate the barrier of tuition and better serve students of low socioeconomic status. Yet such redesigning is at the heart of the praxis within St. Malachy. The efforts of this school community are analogous to Freire's (1973) description of an oppressor moving to solidarity with the oppressed by abandoning "pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures" and instead "risk[ing] acts of love" (p. 34).

Grounding this study in a conceptual framework that draws from this Freirian notion of praxis is also appropriate because St. Malachy, as an institution, experiences oppression. In the words of the principal, Ms. Hart, the school was “borne out of crisis.” Following national trends, multiple Catholic elementary schools in the Midwestern city where St. Malachy is located were slated to close in the 1990s. As a last-ditch effort, St. Malachy was created as an amalgamation of five schools into one new school. The leaders, both formal (administrators, board members) and informal (teachers within the school who have taken on leadership roles) who participated in this study, exhibited a keen awareness that their school was in a struggle to survive. In contrast to other Catholic schools in the area that enjoyed ample resources and had waiting lists for enrollment, St. Malachy slogged to recruit new students, retain the ones it had, and reach a more stable financial footing. Formed over a decade before I conducted this study, the school was just beginning to get its footing with some continuity in leadership and staff. Thus, the praxis of Catholic social teachings, emphasizing the values of human dignity, the common good, and a preferential option for the marginalized provides an apt lens for examining the data in this study.

Research Method

I draw this study from an instrumental multicase study (Stake, 1995; Toma, 2006) of five Catholic elementary schools serving traditionally marginalized students in urban areas of the Midwest that I conducted in 2004 to 2005. More than half of the student populations in all of these schools qualified for free or reduced-price lunches, were people of color, were English-language learners, or had identified special needs. Of 56 potential sites, I selected five that demonstrated stability in finances and enrollment numbers and whose principals were interested in participating in the research. Compared to the other four schools, St. Malachy had the most heterogeneous student body across multiple dimensions of diversity. I chose St. Malachy as an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) to provide insights into how formal and informal school leaders promote inclusivity as their school community experiences accelerating degrees of diversity across multiple dimensions.

During the 2004 to 2005 school year I made five visits to the school community (each lasting 1 or 2 school days) to collect data through qualitative methodologies (Maxwell, 1998; Patton, 1990) of interviewing key individuals, observing meetings, classes, and school events, and gathering archival documents. I conducted semistructured interviews (Glesne, 1999; Yin, 2003), which I approached as interpersonal conversations in which knowledge evolves through dialogue (Kvale, 2001). A total of 19 research participants in the St. Malachy school community fell into categories of administrators, faculty, staff, and volunteers (including board members).

Interviews lasted, on average, an hour. On all occasions, I followed up with subsequent e-mail or phone communication with research participants, and, several times, with subsequent interviews. I transcribed these interviews verbatim and made these transcripts available for review by research participants.

I triangulated the emerging themes of the interviews with data from observations and documents (Stake, 1995). During 30 hr of site visits, I conducted both systematic observations of classrooms, assemblies, faculty meetings, and non-academic periods (i.e., lunch, recess), and informal observations of the school community. Field notes and analytic memos from these visits added to my data (Maxwell, 1998). I also gathered documentation regarding St. Malachy's enrollment trends, mission implementation, policies and procedures of recruitment and retention, and funding and governance structures during the past decade. These documents allowed me to develop a more textured profile of the school community.

In my design and execution of this study, I sought trustworthiness and authenticity (Toma, 2006). Utilizing HyperRESEARCH software, I coded and analyzed these data (interview, observational, and archival) through a constant comparative process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glesne, 1999) of categorizing the data and contextualizing the relationships between these categories (Maxwell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As Toma stated, "data analysis in qualitative research constantly pushes and pulls at the conceptual framework used and the research questions posed" (p. 407). My analysis looked at evidence of the praxis of applying the values of human dignity, the common good, and a preferential option for the marginalized in building a school community exhibiting inclusivity toward traditionally marginalized students. I employed a broad understanding of inclusivity (Kulgelmass, 2004; Sapon-Shevin, 2007). Sapon-Shevin defines *inclusivity* as

> a core value and set of practices that support . . . all students in a school, regardless of their strengths, weaknesses, or labels . . . [as] full members of the general education school community, with their individual needs met within that general education context. (p. xii)

The St. Malachy School Community

St. Malachy School is in the heart of a residential neighborhood in a major metropolitan area in the Midwestern United States. Like many neighborhoods, this one slides quickly from pockets of stability to instability. Some houses sport fresh paint and seasonal decorations, others languish in disrepair, and others are abandoned. At a park a few blocks from school I often saw

children and caregivers play, yet research participants described it as unsafe after dark. One nearby commercial stretch had a vibrant café that was frequently packed, whereas in another stretch, a few blocks in a different direction, the storefronts were empty and businesses closed.

St. Malachy stands in this neighborhood with a humble dignity. The red-brick exterior is clean and tidy, and, in the residential area, the school towers on a cramped lot, leaving little room for green space. Inside, the halls and classrooms are strikingly bright and cheery. Student work, both academic and artistic, lines the walls. Renovations recently expanded the school to accommodate more students and make the building accessible. Though one can easily tell the old sections from the new, the building feels cohesive. Appearances are clearly important to the principal, who, as we tour the building, brings this up on several occasions.

Multiple dimensions of diversity suffuse the St. Malachy community. In the classrooms, hallways, and cafeteria, the 370 students are eclectic across race and ethnicity. On average, two third (67%) of the student population identified themselves as either Black (37%) or Latino (30%), and the rest identified themselves as White (16%), multiracial (10%), Asian (4%), or other (3%). In socioeconomic terms, just more than two third (67%) of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, and 3 of every 4 families (76%) were receiving tuition assistance. The median income of families applying for tuition assistance was US$24,000. In terms of linguistic diversity, more than one third (36%) were identified as English-language learners. The families of English-language learners were primarily of Spanish origin. These students were disproportionately represented in the lower grades, which indicates that this population is growing in the school. Curiously, the school serves a markedly more diverse population across dimensions of race, ethnicity, and economics than the community in which it is situated. In contrast to the school, half the population in the community is White and only 1 in 5 lives in poverty, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2002). Although many Catholic schools attract student bodies that are more homogeneous across these dimensions (Baker & Riordan, 1998, 1999; Gray & Gautier, 2006; Harris, 2000; Riordan, 2000), St. Malachy does the opposite. Religious ceremonies, rituals, and symbols blend traditional Catholic elements with ecumenical influences that emphasize social justice and critical spirituality. Though 97% of the families identified as Christian, only 47% identified as Catholic. St. Malachy was growing more heterogeneous across these dimensions of diversity (race, ethnicity, socioeconomic, linguistic, and religious). In the past 3 years, the population of Latino preschool-age children grew by 31%, whereas the number of White non-Hispanic children rose by 2% only. The school has also increased the number of students in poverty that it serves, as Mr. Mathy (all names are pseudonyms), the business manager for the past 5 years, described: “Our free and reduced

lunch number has gone from 55 to 75%. . . . It hung around 45% to 50% for the first 7 to 8 years of the school, and, in the last few years, it's made a dramatic jump."

St. Malachy was originally created in the early 1990s as a consolidation of five neighborhood parish schools. The original student body was primarily Catholic, but this has shifted to an ecumenical student body reflective of the neighborhood. At the time of the study, students from 50 different congregations, the majority of whom were Christian but not Catholic, attended St. Malachy, along with a significant and, according to the principal, growing population of students whose families claimed no religious affiliation.

Although increasingly diverse across dimensions of race, ethnicity, class, and language, St. Malachy was less heterogeneous regarding providing service to students with special needs, both with and without disability labels. Leaders at the school describe attempts to serve such students but acknowledged that they do not always succeed. Only 12 (3%) of the students had formal disability labels, and, as Ms. Hart, the principal at St. Malachy for the past 5 years, explained, students were sometimes asked to leave due to disabilities that the school did not find means to accommodate: "Over the past two years, we have transitioned 3 students out of our school to alternative settings due to educational needs we could not meet here." Yet contrary to many Catholic schools (Author, in press-b), St. Malachy has articulated a service delivery system for meeting the needs of students with special needs, both with and without disability labels. Ms. Kendell, who has served as the assistant principal since the school's inception, described the "child study team" that they have developed. This team, comprised of an administrator, the teacher, a consultant from a local agency that provides special education resource support, and other school personnel as appropriate (e.g., bilingual resource support, social worker, family liaison), works "with parents, teachers, and students with making an academic plan, be that modified homework, or accommodations for their need—whatever is appropriate for that particular child." This plan may include coordinating with the local public-school-district resource personnel for direct and indirect special education services, providing a learning center with assistance for students after school and offering counseling services to individual students or entire families.

Another key consideration when considering the case of St. Malachy is the homogeneity of the educators in the school. The research participants in this study were primarily White (84%) and women (67%) who were monolingual (79%). Of the 21 research participants (6 teachers, 5 administrators, 5 support staff, and 5 volunteers/board members), only 2 teachers and 1 staff member were people of color. The experience level of the teachers and administrators ranges from being in their first year to being at the school since it was opened 12 years ago.

Finally, St. Malachy, though stable in enrollment and invested with recent capital improvements, was perpetually in a quandary of staying fiscally solvent. St. Malachy has a regional, rather than a single-parish, affiliation. This unique structure contributes to the financial management of the school. Each founding parish continues to contribute financially to the school, accounting for roughly 10% of the income. Second, significant support from the central diocese (the Catholic-school version of district administration) accounts for 25% of the budgetary income. Annual tuition, which accounted for less than 20% of the budget income, is US$1,750 per student. As mentioned, 3 out of 4 students receive assistance for this. Mr. Mathy, the business manager, explained, “The diocese contribution hasn’t changed in 5 years . . . [and] Parishes are pretty limited in what they can do. So in order to keep tuition reasonable it requires that our fundraising number goes up every year.” Accordingly, St. Malachy has a full-time development director to raise what amounts to nearly 40% of the annual budget income.

With this overview established, we now turn to examine the specific data regarding how formal and informal school leaders promote inclusivity as their school community experiences accelerating degrees of diversity across multiple dimensions. Three intertwining categories of data emerged: governance and resource management, professional growth, and mission. I will address each in turn.

Governance and Resource Management

The data showed that educators in St. Malachy promote inclusivity in the face of accelerating diversity across multiple dimensions through innovative approaches to governance and resource management. The school found itself constantly pioneering new practices; Principal Hart explained,

> That’s been one of our challenges too—finding models—we’ve found that we’re continually inventing our own . . . for us as a school that’s trying to break new ground—there aren’t too many places for us to look because there aren’t any other models here.

Articles on the school history and discussions with numerous research participants confirmed this description. Simply put, for the school to survive, its leaders needed to create governance structures to facilitate better use of resources that would allow the school to meet the changing needs of its student population.

Evolving governance

The data showed that St. Malachy was building its governance structure at both staff and board levels. Multiple administrative functions were being distributed in St. Malachy, whereas, in other Catholic elementary schools, they would typically be collapsed into the position of the principal. As Ms. Hart was the principal for the past 5 years, her role grew into a complex blend of overseeing both the instructional environment and the overarching development and outreach efforts. Ms. Hart began sharing administrative responsibilities across an array of positions, including assistant principal, dean of students (serving to coordinate support services to students), family liaison, volunteer coordinator, business administrator, and development director. Flexibility and pragmatism allowed St. Malachy to develop layered administrative positions in response to changing needs and context.

A second piece of governance that emerged as important was the role and composition of its board of trustees. St. Malachy developed a governing board responsible for, in the words of the school handbook, "oversee[ing] the overall operation of the school and set[ting] the direction for the school." Both trustees and school leaders described this board as increasingly composed of high-profile professionals from local business, university, and Catholic organizations. As one trustee put it, their role "is evolving now. Initially we were thrown in and asked to raise money," but now they understand themselves as personally and collectively responsible for the school's survival. Ms. Hart described a practical example of this:

> My business administrator [Mr. Mathy] was mentioning that people want the information there when they need it. They're not going to look at it when they're not in the market for a school, or when they're not dissatisfied with their local school. So that's something that we don't have our hands around, big time. We just started the marketing subcommittee on our board of trustees to try to address this challenge. And again, it's one of those things in that we're unique in this diocese— we don't know how anyone else does this.

The main goal of the board remains fundraising, but they have grown to assume a sense of "ownership" in the school. This model of governance, namely, a governing board comprised of active community members building the capacity of the school, departs from many Catholic elementary schools with advisory boards composed primarily of parents.

Resource management

These governance structures at the administrative and board levels are directly related to

resource management. As a private school that depends on attracting and retaining students as well as on raising funds, St. Malachy is adept in accessing community resources and undertaking innovative and extensive measures to engage direct and in-kind support from multifarious constituents. Certain positions, such as the development director, are directly related to attaining new resources for the school. Such positions, typical in Catholic secondary schools, are increasingly recognized as core to innovative Catholic elementary schools striving to survive in urban areas with financial models that do not rely exclusively on tuition and parish investments for income (Brennan, Callahan, & Haney, 1999; Haney & O'Keefe, 1999).

Board members are actively involved in ongoing planning and development efforts, part of which had been accomplished in the recent consolidation of the school from two sites into one, which entailed an investment of more than US$3 million. As a board member conveyed, the resource management has evolved at St. Malachy to build a wider base of constituents willing to invest money in the school:

> Fundraising has always been a primary need for survival, and I guess the way it has evolved to the present point is we have less crises and . . . no longer feel like the survival of the school is on an imminent, year-to-year basis. We do have a larger number of board members who are more representative of the community as a whole, and not just the founding parishes. . . . We also have other partners represented at the table because we've had to take a hub and spoke kind of structural approach to finding partners. So that has meant reaching out in nontraditional ways to other powerful parishes which I would describe as superstores who have the clout and see the mission of not only helping somebody in Uganda, but helping somebody who's 5 miles away from their church.

These efforts at expanding the resource base involved indirect and in-kind support as well as direct financial contributions. For instance, Mr. Mathy, the business manager, described how pro bono consulting facilitated the strategic planning:

> We did begin in January a strategic planning process. The Kain Company, they did one for Catholic Charities and they are doing a pro bono process for us . . . to ask that very question: What kind of a school do we envision ourselves being and how do we get there? That's a process involving staff and board.

Mr. Mathy's description of the shared responsibility for this planning, involving the board and staff, point to an important dimension of the governance and resource allocation that emerges in this case, namely, the shared ownership for the school community.

Ms. Apple, the school counselor, illustrates another example of how the resource base has expanded to meet the shifting needs of the student body. Ms. Apple describes the growing need she has seen over her past 6 years at the school: "Initially I was here 2 days a week, then 3, now 4 days." She continued by explaining that when it came to counseling services, the demand exceeded the capacity: "There are kids who have been referred to me who I haven't really started working with yet. And there are new referrals coming all the time, too. So there's not nearly enough time." St. Malachy has been able to employ Ms. Apple through a partnership with Catholic Charities, a local nonprofit agency that employs her, provides her insurance and benefits, and half of her pay. Thus, St. Malachy is able to receive a counselor for 4 days a week at a fraction of the true cost of this employee. These are some examples illustrating the role of innovative governance and resource management in St. Malachy that directly affected the school's response to accelerated levels of diversity across multiple dimensions.

Professional Growth

Professional growth was a second dimension to how the St. Malachy school community pursued inclusivity. School leaders in St. Malachy targeted and aligned professional growth to build the capacity of the staff to serve the students effectively. Broadly speaking, this professional growth is focused on differentiating instruction, cultivating a positive school climate, and teaching students who are English-language learners. Two key examples of the professional growth that I focus on here are the emphases on antiracism and discipline. Unexpectedly, these emerged as intertwining features contributing to the pursuit of inclusivity in the school.

Antiracism training

As a newcomer to the school, Ms. Hart quickly recognized that race was a central issue: "As we are the school that we are—mostly White, middle-class women teaching poor children of color—it's obvious that race matters here in what we do." In August of 2003, she organized an initial workshop on institutional racism and antiracism. All members of administration, faculty, and staff attended. She recounted her colleagues' responses:

> It was real interesting, real interesting. The whole gamut, from you've got to be kidding—this is garbage—it's not true—why are you trying to make me out to be

> the bad guy (of course, that was the White people), to, interestingly enough, every staff person of color came up to me and personally said, "thank you" (which to me said, "We obviously need this"); it was the best thing they'd ever been at; finally someone was talking about it; it's about time, those kinds of reactions.

Yet as Ms. Hart describes, the praxis of antiracism was initiated, not instituted, through this workshop:

> So it was kind of an exposure to the concept of institutional racism— and out of that was [my question to the faculty] "OK—do you want to do anything with this?" And yes, a number of people said, "yes." So a taskforce was formed, and they spent a year, kind of talking and working together, trying to deliberate on whether or not we should go, creating a position statement—which was that we recognize that St. Malachy is a racist institution because all institutions in America are—and we want to acknowledge that, and now that we have, we want to do something about it.
>
> So that task force invited the school community, anyone who was interested to try out to become part of a team. They call it a Transformation Team that's going to take a look at the institution of St. Malachy School and see in what ways we can become an antiracist institution. We had about 20 to 22 people apply to be on this team, and 12 were chosen. The task force interviewed them—and I sat in on the interviews too. They are parents, staff, and community members—five staff, including myself ended up on the team.

Ms. Apple, the counselor, was part of this task force that engaged in the initial work. She described it as "the real deal," distinguished from the emphasis on multiculturalism in the past:

> Multiculturalism . . . is very real here at this school as you can see in the student body, the holidays and the way in which we celebrate those holidays—what you see when you enter the school in the art, etc. That's all very real. But that's not antiracism. That's what the antiracism is about, "Now let's become more multicultural."

This nascent antiracism training in St. Malachy had not materialized into changes in

practice at the school level at the time of this research. However, the pursuit of becoming antiracist connects back to governance and resource management. Title II funds enable Ms. Hart to fund continued professional development for the Transformation Team. These funds are available because the leadership team works to identify the resources and target them toward this goal. The team is participating in 30 hr of training. Parents who participate on the team receive a tuition reduction as an incentive. A member of the board of trustees is also participating on the team. Investing resources in this team builds the capacity of the school by growing a small cadre of antiracism leaders to work within the wider school community.

Disciplinary program

Along with the professional growth pursuing antiracism, the disciplinary program that St. Malachy provides a second example of how the school leaders promote inclusivity. In contrast to the antiracism, which was just beginning, the professional development around a refined approach to discipline had been ongoing for a few years at the time of this study. Ms. Hart described the concerns regarding discipline that she encountered when she came to the school:

> One of the things that when I came here as a principal that I always heard was, "Discipline is a problem here! The kids are out of control! Now, some of that was well founded, some of that was racially motivated. Coming out of the chaos of this school, there were times when I'm not sure anyone knew who was in charge, including the children! That was something that was made very clear to me when I came, that this was something that needed to be addressed.

According to research participants who worked in the school, St. Malachy had been heading toward an exclusionary approach to addressing student behavior, with the parent advisory committee recommending what Ms. Hart described as a "one-or-two-strikes-and-you're-out"–type policy. The school adopted a program promoting the teaching of self-discipline skills called "Discipline With Purpose" (Discipline With Purpose, 2007; Kearney, 1996; Tanner, 1978). This program focuses on specific skills (e.g., listening, questioning, distinguishing facts from feelings) to teach students to act responsibly and respectfully. Teachers and administrators described the reform as yielding positive results. In a commentary reflective of many teachers, Ms. Paige, a second-year teacher at the school, described the program:

> We spent a lot of time last year talking about it and assessing where it was at

> because it was the 3-year mark. And most people seemed to feel like we're headed in the absolute right direction. We have a common language throughout the school. We know what to expect for children even that aren't at our grade level. There are skills we can talk about with all the students. . . . There are still some things to work out, such as some of the consequences when rules are broken, and how are we going to communicate with the administration and handle things when kids mess up, but most people feel like it's definitely gotten us into the right frame of mind discipline wise and that we still need to be patient with ourselves and still wait another 2 to 3 years before it has a profound impact.

Observations of the school's daily operations and interviews with other school faculty and staff confirmed this description. Teachers described the climate of their classes as calm and engaged, and observations of the school culture supported this. Ms. Kendell, the assistant principal, described how the professional development focused on discipline provided the school a framework for restructuring how the school addressed student and classroom management. When asked whether the school ever asked students to withdraw from the school because of behavior infractions, she described a change:

> That has happened occasionally. We try not to have it happen but it has happened sometimes in the last few years. But particularly since starting this [discipline] program it hasn't. Part of this is because when the plan is in place if children are showing improvement and showing progress, we can continue to work with them.

As another aspect of the discipline, St. Malachy shows evidence of engaging the students and families in a proactive approach to fostering a positive school climate. Part of this proactive approach involves hiring personnel. Two part-time family liaisons, both with long-standing connections to the community, and a bilingual support teacher, all serve as resources to the teachers and administrators in building positive relationships with the students and their families. Ms. Hart, describing herself as "a dumb, middle-age White woman," draws on these individuals to help her identify and address potential problems quickly. For instance, the school responds immediately to "gang-related activity or paraphernalia or signs" within the student body. Issues of gang violence were not academic in St. Malachy. During my many visits, one morning, as I approached the faculty lounge, I found it was abuzz with the news of a

graduate who had shot someone the night before. Another event at the school involved bringing an alumnus of the school in to talk to the students about pledging to not use guns. The alumnus, a successful student in a leadership role at a local college, was a paraplegic confined to a wheelchair. He was injured in a gang-related shooting shortly after leaving St. Malachy. Simply put, the St. Malachy school community was traumatized by issues of violence in tangible ways and strove to directly combat these by creating a school climate characterized by respect, order, and safety.

As I will discuss later in this article, these two emphases, antiracism and discipline, point to the pragmatic components of the teaching and learning environment that affect students across multiple dimensions of diversity. They complement each other in important manners. Without an emphasis on acknowledging and addressing the individual and institutional dimensions of racism and White privilege, the emphasis on improving the order and discipline in the school would be much more likely to be implemented in a covertly racist manner. The school leaders showed discernment in acknowledging and ameliorating the cultural mismatch of educators, who were mostly White, and students and families, who were mostly people of color. At the same time, the concerns with discipline and safety cut across racial and class lines: People chose to send their students to St. Malachy because of “the safe atmosphere,” according to surveys of families that the school conducted annually. This point came up time and again through interviews with educators and board members as a key way in which the school was serving the community. In other words, the (predominantly White) educators needed to foster an atmosphere of safety and discipline without blithely ignoring how issues of race, racism, and White privilege complicated this task. Professional development on both of these fronts (antiracism and discipline) contributed to this.

Mission

I have discussed two key findings of how St. Malachy promoted inclusivity across multiple dimensions of diversity, namely, through the governance and resource management, as well as through the professional development. The third finding scaffolds these two: The overarching mission of St. Malachy directly and indirectly reflects the values articulated in Catholic social teachings, namely human dignity, the common good, and a preferential option for the marginalized. The school principal is the key catalyst behind the way the mission is understood and communicated throughout the school community.

In its formal mission statement, St. Malachy commits to “teaching and promoting Catholic values and traditions, developing spiritual, academic, social, physical and personal integrity in

each student and nurturing civic and church leaders of tomorrow." The school articulates its Catholic identity by explicitly addressing CST in its handbook: "St. Malachy School is committed to promoting Catholic values and traditions. The social justice teachings of the Church beautifully articulate these values." The handbook continues to list seven core dimensions of these teachings, several of which directly apply to creating a teaching and learning community inclusive toward traditionally marginalized students. This emphasis places a focus on dimensions of Catholicism that are more ecumenical in nature, which may reflect a strategy to engage the religiously diverse population.

In addition to this explicit language around mission, the school culture speaks to a mission to serve the community. In schoolwide rituals, the educators in St. Malachy emphasized the spirit of these values, though they seldom named them directly. For instance, at a school mass an alumnus of St. Malachy and a survivor of a drive-by shooting came to speak. He encouraged the students to find ways to stay safe within the community and avoid violence. Another example of this emphasis on social values was the school "Peace Pole," which was prominently located on the grounds and used as a focal point in prayer rituals of the school community. Several research participants described the school tradition of identifying the different religious congregations to which students were members and formally welcoming representatives from these faith communities into the school.

St. Malachy explicitly and implicitly understands its mission as a Catholic school in a universal, not parochial manner. As a consolidated school, St. Malachy needs to reach beyond individual parish communities while striving to not alienate the founding parishes on whom the school still relies for financial support. In addition, with the majority population being non-Catholic, the school needs to frame its mission in ecumenical language, as still demonstrating an identity that can clearly be identified as Catholic. Service to the community was central to this identity. As Ms. Lyle, the assistant principal, explained, "We are not really a parish school, but a community school." In language consistent with the espoused mission, educators throughout St. Malachy identified serving an increasingly diverse community as a central goal of the school. For instance, Mr. Mathy, the business administrator, framed the school's Catholic identity in these terms:

> I would say [our mission] is to provide an education . . . for the children who live in south [city name]. I think we're . . . a Catholic school in that we do that because that's what we do as Catholics. We're not a Catholic school because we have mass or we have crucifixes in the classrooms. Our catholicity is in our outreach to children who are in need and who are looking for a safe place to receive an

education.

Ms. Braun, a veteran teacher who has taught at the school for more than a decade and was a leader on staff, describes the mission of the school “as providing a safe place in this community for families to bring their children where they can have a very diverse experience and in a place that’s small enough to build community and have an underlying value system.” She reflected that the school has broadened its focus in the past decade beyond emphasizing the Catholic denomination: “We’ve become more of a community school—welcoming all beliefs.” Ms. Paige, a novice teacher at the school, reflected on the mission in similar terms: “It’s about giving these kids structure, expectations, about embracing everybody that comes to us, whether it’s culturally diverse or religiously diverse, we embrace everybody, and we’re here to accept.” Ms. Kendell, the assistant principal, described a core value of the school as “Believing that everyone has a chance and deserves a chance, and just learning from the children. That companionship is critical.”

Other data underscored the point that the school is responsive to the needs of the increasingly pluralistic student body. For instance, pictures of saints outside each classroom reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of the students, and a mural composed of the faces of all the students adorned the entrance hallway. Ms. Everts, a teacher of the early elementary grades for the past 2 years, described the parent–teacher conferences as bringing in a range of families: “We have all the way from professional parents—parents who are educators or psychologists or whatever—to new arrivals to this country . . . doing jobs like cleaning or restaurant work—or shift or minimum wage.” As gathering data directly from students was beyond the scope of this study, observations of school rituals, such as religious services or seasonal celebrations, as well as daily interactions of students in classes, hallways, and the cafeteria lent credence to these descriptions of the school mission.

Principal as catalyst

The principal’s attitude toward schooling is a central catalyst to reviewing and adapting the mission to better promote social justice, particularly with a focus on the marginalized. Ms. Hart described this with eloquence, telling the story of how her journey to St. Malachy transformed her:

> I am passionate about the issue of justice for children. That all children are unique and gifts—priceless gifts from God—why don’t we treat them that way? Why do poor kids get stuck in slum schools with inadequate curriculums and substandard

> buildings, when the Catholic school down the street that serves an upper middle-class population has all the bells and whistles? That's not justice.
>
> Our children—all children deserve an outstanding education—and a safe and warm environment that values them because they are important— that's why I'm here and why we try so hard for that. I came from a small rural community about 30 miles from here—and was there for 8 years. [The interview committee asked me] "What do you know about diversity?" And my answer was that in there's Polish and German—that's it. So it's been a really wonderful education for me. It's a place that has transformed me—because, again, my experiences were not the experiences of these children. So it forced me to look at a lot of things very differently and I appreciate that. Most days I appreciate that! But it's definitely been a wonderful place to be because we can truly, truly make a difference for kids. And there aren't very many places where you know you can make a difference.

Ms. Hart reflects on the implementation of the mission with a mix of pride at the accomplishments, but candor at the shortcomings:

> I think we're really getting there. I think in the respect that all mission statements are kind of utopian in that they speak to the ideal. Ours says to welcome everyone, regardless of race, socioeconomic, religion, and I think we're doing a pretty good job of that. It also says, "We're going to meet the needs of every individual child." And I think we're taking a real hard look at children from different backgrounds who bring different needs with them. If you have a different experience of life or culture you come with that experience and it's not necessarily what the mainstream says you need by age five. If you don't speak any English, then that's a wall, and we have to address those needs rather than just say, "We're teaching you in English, and it's up to you to figure it out."

Ms. Hart's efforts seemed to catalyze the school community to deepen understanding of mission and the connection of this to educating traditionally marginalized students. Frequently in interviews, when asked what led to change in the school community to more effectively serve students on the margins, participants referred to the arrival of Ms. Hart in the school. Teachers and board members described her in phrasing such as "the perfect fit" and "just what we needed

as a school."

In sum, the mission of the school reflects the values of human dignity, the common good, and a preferential option for the marginalized in multifarious ways. In the following discussion, I analyze the strengths and inconsistencies in these data regarding how the mission, professional development, and governance and resources affect inclusivity within this private school community as it experiences accelerating degrees of diversity across multiple dimensions.

Discussion

The praxis of CST provides a critical lens to view inclusivity within the St. Malachy school community. The data show dimensions of mission, professional development, and governance and resource management to reflect these values, although in complex, nonlinear, and complicated ways. The school made concerted efforts to better serve students of color (e.g., pursuing antiracism training) and linguistically diverse families (e.g., hiring more bilingual staff and providing professional development on teaching students who are English-language learners). To pursue these efforts required an expanded resource base, a more comprehensive governance structure, a refinement of the school mission, and targeted professional development. The values of CST support these efforts and, at times, were directly drawn on in this.

Yet these steps were not sequentially or deliberately pursued. Rather, an array of intersecting phenomena resulted in particular strategies bubbling up as appropriate. A number of individuals, including a veteran African American teacher in the school and the relatively new White principal, grew more cognizant of how dimensions of White privilege and institutional racism were present in their school. The increasingly heterogeneous student body across dimensions of race and ethnicity contributed to this awareness. The availability of federal funds for professional development created a pool of resources that would enable a wider range of school leaders to explore these issues in more depth. Thus, multiple phenomena coalesced at a particular time to lead the school to pursue antiracism professional development. Rather than pursuing inclusivity in a direct path, educators in St. Malachy responded to their increasingly diverse student body in manners that were often nonlinear, serendipitous, and accidental.

Adding to the complexities of this, the educators in St. Malachy were wrestling with crises to help their school overcome direct barriers to their survival. One barrier was the dearth of resources. As described, the school recently consolidated from two sites into one building, involving extensive renovations. The debt from these moves contributed to a budget deficit of US$200,000. In addition, the school continually struggled to balance the funding from tuition with

more effective fundraising and development. Other barriers were organizational, privileging certain dimensions of diversity over others. For instance, St. Malachy struggled to structure service delivery to students who exhibited increasing linguistic diversity and diagnosed disabilities as well as undiagnosed special needs. Culturally responsive symbols and artwork, rituals to engage students from diverse faith traditions, and efforts to serve the broader needs through family counseling were some examples of this. The school's service delivery to students who were English-language learners or who had special needs (either as diagnosed disabilities or undiagnosed barriers to learning) was less developed. Regarding students who were English-language learners, the school had progressed on making several significant modifications, such as translating documents into Spanish and providing translators for conferences. Yet they failed to articulate a formal approach to bilingual education. Likewise, as striving to provide professional development for teachers on differentiation of instruction, the school lacked a service delivery system for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The renovations of the school had included making the building accessible, taking a step toward inclusion. At the same time, students who qualified for services were daily bussed to a local public school to receive this help, thus excluding them from a portion of the school day at St. Malachy. Some evidence also suggested how dimensions of a professional learning community were lacking in this school community. Ms. Paige complained that despite the collaboration on the approach to discipline, "There's really no forum here for professional dialogue."

These barriers to survival, as one board member put it, left St. Malachy "constantly in crisis mode." The school was stable but tenuous. Considerable evidence showed that the reforms in governance and resource management, professional development, and mission strengthened this private school community's pursuit of inclusivity in the face of accelerating degrees of diversity across multiple dimensions. The data also show, however, the clarity of this pursuit varied widely. Simply put, praxis of CST failed to provide in the school a model that consistently and directly led efficacy and viability in St. Malachy School serving traditionally marginalized students.

Conclusions

The case of St. Malachy suggests a unique niche for Catholic schools to play within the private sector. CST emphasize human dignity, the common good, and a preferential option for the marginalized (Byron, 1999; Curran, 2002; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004; Walsh, 1998). These teachings compel Catholic K-12 schools to serve students disadvantaged by barriers of poverty, disability, and home language. In recent decades, Catholic schools have

struggled to serve such traditionally marginalized students (Baker & Riordan, 1998; Brachear & Ramirez, 2005; Dwyer, 2005; Hunt, 2000; Riordan, 2000), despite compelling evidence that they are successful when they do (Cibulka et al., 1982; Coleman et al., 1982; Convey, 1992; Hoffer et al., 1985; Hunt et al., 2006; Jepsen, 2003; Jeynes, 2006; Vitullo-Martin, 1979). In an age when myriad societal pressures are leading to the eliting of Catholic elementary schools, the case of St. Malachy points to a countervailing narrative. As an investigation of inclusive private schools, this study provides a unique lens to consider dynamics that empower and inhibit schools to choose to embrace traditionally marginalized students.

This case also suggests that researchers concerned with promoting social justice education by reducing barriers to traditionally marginalized students can deepen their dialogue across schooling sectors. Public/private discourse regarding effective schooling frequently deteriorates into vitriolic debate about which sector has the more effective model. The case of St. Malachy describes how a private school is making deliberate efforts to contribute to the public good by reducing barriers to traditionally marginalized students, albeit in limited and at times inconsistent manners. Schools serving these students often share similar missions and struggles. Educators in both public and private schooling sectors can learn from this case to make efforts to collaborate with one another.

In conclusion, in St. Malachy the dimensions of mission, professional development, and governance and resource management emerged as both central and enmeshed with each other in the pursuit of providing education to students across accelerating dimensions of diversity. Some progress was made, though the journey was far from complete, and considerable barriers remained. This case, though not striding confidently, shows that St. Malachy slogged and stumbled toward inclusivity, but, however imperfect, it remains an ally in the broader pursuit of social justice schooling.

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Biography

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