

The Experience of Being a Lay Teacher in Catholic Schools: An Approach for Investigating the History of an Under-researched Field

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Abstract: Internationally, there has been a major output of empirical research on Catholic education over the last two decades. However, it has not been accompanied by a similar corpus of related work indicating possible new directions such research could take, including those that could be undertaken by using a diverse range of methodologies on a wide range of topics neglected to date. This paper indicates one such direction that could be taken in relation to historical research on lay teachers in Catholic schools from the 1940s to the present. First, the historiographical work that has been undertaken on the history of teachers more broadly is considered. An overview on the official status of the laity and the lay teacher historically within the Church is then considered. Finally, an argument for the use of a «life story» research approach for the generation of research questions to investigate the experience of being a lay teacher in Catholic schools. The approach is suitable for «insider research», where the focus is on investigating issues that were of concern for participants, rather than on pursuing pre-ordained questions of interest to the researcher and which usually arise primarily from a reading of the relevant background literature only.

Key Words: Catholic education; schools; lay teachers; life story; innovative research.

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1. Introduction

Internationally, there has been a major output of empirical research on Catholic education over the last two decades. This is very much to be lauded. However, it has not been accompanied by a similar corpus of related work indicating possible new directions such research could take, including those that could be undertaken by using a diverse range of methodologies on a wide range of topics neglected to date. This is true in relation to research on the historical antecedents to contemporary topics and issues in Catholic education, as it is in relation to other fields.

Cogitating this position brings to mind the neglect of research on the history of the Catholic lay teacher internationally. It also raises suggestions on a variety of research approaches that could be used in the field. The rest of this paper is offered as one response to the situation. The general aim is to provoke thought on the historiography of the Catholic lay teacher and, hopefully, stimulate associated research in the field in an attempt to fill the lacuna which exists. Specifically, the emphasis is on highlighting the need to conduct research on the experience of being a lay teacher in Catholic schools in various English-speaking countries throughout the period from the early 1940s to the present. To focus on this period is not to dismiss previous periods as unworthy of attention; they merit major projects in themselves. At the same time, there is a particular urgency about commencing research on it as a large number of people who were lay teachers during the years in question are still alive. Thus, it is possible, on the basis of their oral testimony, to conduct semi-structures interviews with them on the experience of being a lay teacher in Catholic schools so that a set of research questions to be subsequently pursued through the identification and analysis of related written sources can be generated.

The paper is in three parts. First, the broad background is presented. Here the focus is on locating the history of Catholic lay teachers within the context of the historiographical work that has been undertaken on the history of teachers more broadly. An overview on the official status of the laity and the lay teacher historically within the Church is then provided. Finally, an argument for the use of a «life story» research approach for the generation of research questions to investigate the experience of being a lay teacher in Catholic schools from the 1940s through to the present is put forward. This approach is suitable for «insider research» of the type being proposed here, where the focus is on investigating issues that were of concern for participants, rather than on pursuing pre-ordained questions of interest to the researcher and which usually arise primarily from a reading of the relevant background literature only.

2. The Broad Background

The broad background to this paper is the increasing interest over the past 20 years in the history of teachers and teaching, with researchers drawing on a range of theoretical and methodological approaches (McCulloch & Woodin, 2010). During the 1980s and early 1990s, historians of education in the United States (Altenbaugh, 1992; Finkelstein, 1989, 1998) began to open up the field, particularly in relation to the lives of teachers in government schools. This tradition was continued in the next decade in work like that undertaken by Rousmaniere (2009). As the research output developed in both quality and extent, however, Silver (1994) argued that, apart from similar work in Canada, the remainder of the English-speaking world was not quite as active on the same front. Three years later, in 1997, attention was drawn to the situation whereby teachers in the United Kingdom (UK) constituted an occupational group whose lives historically were under-researched (Gardner & Cunningham, 1997). Nevertheless, it is only in the last decade-and-a-half that the situation has begun to be addressed for the UK context through work like that of Goodman and

Martin (2002), Robinson (2004), Cunningham and Gardner (2004) and Burke and Dudek (2010).

Historians in Australia have been more productive in the field. The early research of Spaul and colleagues on teaching and teacher unionization (Spaul, 1985; Spaul & Sullivan, 1989) has provided essential historical views on the pressures under which teachers work today. Feminist historians (Kyle, 1989; Mackinnon, 1984; Theobald, 1996) have also been major contributors and associated research on the gendered nature of women in teaching was stimulated by works like that of Trimmingham Jack (2003) Trotman (2008) and Whitehead (2003). Research was also undertaken on the role that teachers have played historically in the construction of masculinity (Crotty, 2001) and femininity (Theobald, 1994; Whitehead, 2007).

Much of the work detailed above involved explorations of «the daily interactions of teachers with pupils, colleagues and the public at large, and teachers' own experiences of their pedagogy and work» (McCulloch, 2011, p. 90). However, there is a great deal of research that still needs to be undertaken. In particular, there is a need to recognize, and focus on, specific «types» of teachers for different periods and in different contexts. Catholic lay teachers constitute an important group for study in this regard.

To focus on the history of Catholic lay teachers, and particularly on how they experienced being teachers in Catholic schools, is to seek to contribute not only to the history of teachers and teaching, but also to the trend in recent years where the study of Catholic education, both internationally and nationally, is conceptualized within the parameters of «faith-based schooling». The history of such schooling in much of the Western world from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present day is one of Christian-based institutions being gradually replaced by state-run ones. Nevertheless, throughout that period Christian-based schools continued to constitute a relatively strong minority group, with various religious denominations seeking support, including financial support, from the state in various countries.

The nature of the campaigns undertaken was the focus of interest for many researchers in the first half of the 20th century. Insights regarding the outcomes can be obtained from the work of Madeley (2003) who, having analysed trends in church-state relationships in Western liberal democracies, suggested the emergence of a number of «types» of such relationships, including that where church and state form a partnership in advancing the causes of both institutions, that based on the view that religion and politics should be kept separate, and that where the state seeks equal justice for the plurality of religious and secular views, and neither advantages nor disadvantages any of them. Specifically with regard to the relationship between church and state in education, Miedena (2007) proposed a similar model, arguing that, historically, within Europe, both England and France can be located at two opposite ends of a spectrum, with the English situation largely corresponding to the first of the three types noted above and France, as with the United States, corresponding to the second

By the 1960s, academic interest in Christian schooling waned, influenced partly by the analyses of sociologists of religion whose view generally was that such education provision would soon disappear because, as they saw it, the world was in the grip of an irreversible process of secularization (Bruce, 2003). The assumed

decline was accompanied by secular marginalization, with religion being subtly ignored as unimportant in academic and media worlds. Recently, however, it has become apparent that the gradual retreat of religion from public space which was foreseen, in particular for many European countries, has not become a reality. Indeed, religion is now very much at the forefront of debate and activity. This, as Jackson (2007) put it, is partly due to the global attention it has received as a result of the events of 11 September 2001. Equally, he recognized that positive developments involving religion have had an impact on public consciousness in relation to issues within civil society (Jackson, 2007).

It is against such a background that the renewed focus on «faith-based» schooling needs to be considered. What characterizes such schools is that they «reflect a particular religious worldview in the way they are organized, in what they teach, and in the integration of faith and learning» (Sullivan, 2006, p. 937). The media has become especially interested in the phenomenon. Concurrently, there have been calls for a renewed scholarly emphasis on a wide variety of contemporary issues in the field, including those of a curricular, pedagogical, management and leadership nature (Lawton & Cairns, 2005; Shah, 2006; Luckcock, 2007). This is not to overlook a number of related scholarly works that have appeared over the last two decades. For example, amongst the seminal books that have been published in the case of Catholic schooling (the oldest tradition in Christian schooling) are those of Bryk, Lee and Holland (1993) on the US, Grace (2002) on England, and Sweetman (2002) on New Zealand.

The outstanding body of scholarship, of which the latter works are a part, now needs to be complemented by studies where the focus is very much on the historical background in order to provide an understanding of the broader contexts out of which the current situation has emerged. This brings one back to the position noted already, namely, the need for historical studies on teachers, including Catholic teachers. Regarding the latter, a certain amount of work, summarized by Hellinckx, Simon and Depaepe (2009), has been undertaken on nuns, while O'Donoghue (2013) has summarized what has been undertaken on religious brothers as teachers. Very little, however, has been undertaken on lay teachers.

The small number of contributions on the history of Catholic teachers noted above, while extremely valuable, also highlights the need for engagement in a substantial research project on the experience of being a teacher, including being a lay teacher, in a Catholic school. This is not to overlook those accounts in the extensive number of histories that exist on Catholic education institutions in various countries. These are admirable as attempts to provide some record of the activities of the teaching religious. In general, however, they tend to be hagiographic and to present the work of the religious orders as divinely inspired Catholic altruism, while ignoring the complementary secular perspective which views their undertakings as being the result of a complex interaction of political, social and economic forces. Furthermore, they tend to completely ignore the lay teachers who taught in Catholic schools. Thus, they perpetuate a practice of the Catholic Church in previous decades of viewing lay people in general as being of a lesser status than the *virtuoso*, namely, those who were priests, brothers and nuns (Burley & O'Donoghue, 2007; O'Donoghue & Potts, 2004).

The argument being promoted here is that the situation portrayed above needs to be addressed by engaging in studies on the experience of being a lay teacher in Catholic schools historically. A basic assumption is that while this should be undertaken on a country-by-country basis, it should also, in the fullness of time, lead to the development of comparative studies in the field. In this regard, the case for adopting a comparative approach in the history of education made by Crook and McCulloch is instructive (2002). Also, it is particularly important that such an approach be adopted in relation to the research agenda being proposed here since, as O'Leary (2000, p. xii) has put it, «the [Catholic] Church was one of the first successful trans-national, international and indeed global institutions» and «it has been the longest running organisation of the modern Occident». Indeed, he goes on to say that Roman Catholicism, like Islam, has never, in principle, been national either in form, or content. He elaborated on this as follows:

It (the Catholic Church) is declared to be universal, catholic, and cosmopolitan: unlike its Judaic predecessor it claims that it is not the religion of a people, but of all peoples. Its sacred language, the language of Rome, was at once a language of power and mystery, but also a language to unify its diverse officials – its priests, nuns, monks, abbots, bishops and monsignors – enabling them to transcend their parochial, or ethnic identities (O'Leary, 2000, p. xii).

Keeping this background in mind, a major challenge for the historian of education is to determine the extent to which there was a commonality and divergence across countries in the experience of being a lay teacher in Catholic schools.

Projects of the type being proposed here can also contribute to the research agenda proposed by Weisse (2007, p. 9) who has argued that research on various aspects of faith-based education can contribute to dialogue aimed at preventing conflict and supporting peaceful coexistence in a multi-religious society. This dialogue, he argues, needs to be informed by an understanding of the historical background to the relationship between religion and education in various countries, since lack of it has often led to social conflict and tension. While a range of issues on Catholic education needs to be investigated with such an aim in mind, the experience of being a lay teacher in Catholic schools is a particularly rich one upon which to focus. On this, the next section provides an overview of what we know regarding the official status of the laity and the lay teacher historically, while keeping in mind that hardly any studies exist on how the lay teachers viewed themselves.

3. The Official Status of the Laity and the Lay Teacher Historically

The relative anonymity of the lay teacher within many accounts of teachers and teaching in Catholic schools up to the 1970s is a reflection of the official perspective of Catholic religious orders (including the teaching orders) that their members were superior to all lay people in the eyes of God and the Church (O'Donoghue, 2004). A major feature of the rules and regulations governing the lives of members of the orders was that they should, as much as practically possible, distance themselves from the laity. This was connected both to the notion that the taking of vows was

the very foundation of religious life and to the associated safeguards put in place to ensure that members of religious orders stayed focused on the central objective of their way of life.

Overall, what was communicated was that the lay state was very much an inferior one where great freedom was given to act on human desires, many of which were viewed as being intrinsically evil and as working in opposition to the striving for perfection in this life in order to try to maximize one's chance of entering heaven after one died (O'Donoghue, 2013). The rules of the religious also protected them from coming into regular contact with family life lest it offer its own temptations. In saying this, one is not promoting a view that this is necessarily how the religious themselves saw the situation. Rather, it is more likely that they considered they were set apart as people consecrated to God, while they saw married people as being consecrated to one another and required to be concerned more about the things of this world. At the same time, the structures which operated to regulate their lives meant that the religious were well positioned to safeguard both the privacy of their communities and their own commitment to their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, thus minimizing any temptations which might have encouraged them to leave and join the world of the laity. Furthermore, through being regularly reminded of the arguments put forward to justify their aloofness, they were regularly reconfirmed in the conviction that their way of life was superior to that of others.

Given the position outlined so far, it is not surprising that the official view of the orders was that the lay teachers in their schools were living a lesser form of life in the eyes of the Lord. A major consequence was their exclusion from school policy development. There was no entertainment of the possibility that married life, or living as a single person outside of religious life, might enhance one's qualities as a teacher and as a school manager. Furthermore, ensuring that parents were kept away from the schools as much as possible was part of an overall strategy on the part of the religious to maintain an enormous degree of physical distance between themselves and the laity. On this, it is true that the consistent teaching of the Church has been that parents are the primary educators of their children and that the state has no right to go against parents' wishes on education matters. Equally significant, however, was the Church's assertion that it had a duty to advise and guide parents on the proper education of their children (Elliott, 2004) and that while they had the right to ignore Church advice, they did so «on grave peril of their souls» (Dunn, 1988, p. 100).

As the Catholic hierarchy saw it, only a teaching force with the dedication and commitment of the religious could meet its perceived need and be a sufficient safeguard against the growth of secularist paradigms for interpreting the human condition. The economic dimension to this situation also should not be overlooked; while the employment of lay teachers was not an attractive proposition since it would have meant a drain on scarce financial resources, public pronouncements that the religious were valued because they were not paid salaries were not made. Again, in saying this, it is important to keep in mind how the religious themselves likely saw the situation. It is not, for example, being suggested that they viewed themselves as working for free. Also, while the bishops, particularly during the period of rapid building of Catholic schools in the USA and England from the 1940s to the 1960s,

certainly saw the availability of very large numbers of religious as a boon, it is unlikely that they perceived them as simply slave labour. What was more common was to place the emphasis almost totally on the activity of members of religious orders as being a great sacrifice, while portraying the lay teacher as a substitute.

Specifically regarding the USA, the irony of treating the lay teacher as being second best was, as O'Donnell (1988) pointed out, that they had been a part of Catholic education there from its beginnings. This had also been the situation in Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. Throughout the English-speaking world, however, as the number of those entering religious orders increased greatly in the latter half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the lay teacher was relegated to being a second-class citizen in Catholic schools. On this, Thomas (1989) has demonstrated in relation to Australia that such a perspective reflected the pattern of pronouncements by successive members of the Hierarchy, and that it established the pattern of thought which was to remain dominant until well into the latter half of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the lay teacher was not to disappear from the schools. As the provision of Catholic education, particularly in the twentieth century, continued to expand in various countries faster than the expansion of the religious orders, the employment of more and more lay teachers became necessary. This was accompanied by a certain softening of approach, with some religious orders openly declaring that their lay counterparts should enjoy good working conditions and be happy in their schools. Even so, the approach was that of benevolent employers towards their employees rather than one informed by a view that they were partners with the lay teachers in the provision of Catholic education (O'Donoghue, 2013). Also, it was common to read Church pronouncements defending the employment in secondary schools of priests, religious brothers and religious sisters who were not registered teachers, with the argument that while they might not have university degrees, they were much more suitable for employment in Catholic schools than lay university graduates because of their greater religious, moral and social convictions (O'Donoghue, 2013).

Overall, then, the lay teacher in Catholic secondary schools throughout much of the English-speaking world, was, in the words of a former Secretary of the Department of Education in Ireland, «always the hired man (sic)» (O'Connor, 1968, p. 25). By the late 1950s, however, change was on the horizon as Catholic education continued to grow in many countries. The education policy of the Church in these countries required school places for every Catholic child. This often meant that no limit was placed on enrolments. The situation was compounded when, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the numbers entering religious orders decreased, while others began to move out of classroom teaching and administration into new forms of apostolic work. Recruiting and employing lay teachers, who were often trained in government institutions, became the only real alternative. As a result, Catholic schools were beginning to return to the pattern of the earlier part of the nineteenth century of lay teachers dominating the teaching force (O'Donnell, 1988; Thomas, 1989; O'Connor, 1968; Judge, 2002; Sweetman, 2002).

A new attitude on the part of the religious also began to emerge. Initially, various clerical writers began to advance the position that lay teachers should be

accepted as valuable contributors in the Catholic school (O'Donoghue, 2013). The tone changed again once lay principals began to be appointed in large numbers and various religious congregations began to withdraw from individual schools. The prevailing attitude amongst many in the religious teaching orders was that since their numbers were in decline and since, as a result, they could no longer take the lead in the schools, the laity were now to be welcomed as principals and managers of Catholic schools, and parents should have much more of a say than previously in policy decisions regarding the nature and structure of Catholic education. The official position of the Church, however, went significantly further, affirming that the laity, as members of the Church, had rights and responsibilities in education equal to those of the religious. On this, a principle laid down by the Second Vatican Council that had implications for education was the affirmation of the role and the responsibility of the laity, both in human society and in the life and structures of the Church (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982).

McLaughlin (2008) has elaborated at length on how the latter principle was reiterated in various documents of the Vatican-based Congregation of Catholic Education. The essential focus of these is that Catholic education should involve the nurturing of the humanity of its students, and that the Christ experience for many students should be conveyed primarily through the humanity of dedicated and pastoral Catholic educators. They emphasised that the Catholic school should be focused on serving the common good, nurturing a community dynamic, committing itself to the service of the poor, and having its education mission based on love and generating an inclusive community.

McLaughlin (2008) goes on to remind us that, in pursuing such a vision, religious and lay personnel were meant to be equal partners. In other words, the official Church position is that both the religious and the lay people should embrace a common calling to be God's people and share a common mission. However, the response of lay teachers within the context of how historically they saw themselves is an area on which there is a very limited knowledge base. As one step towards addressing this deficit, the remainder of this paper outlines how research questions for conducting research projects on the experience of being a lay teacher in various Catholic schools in the English-speaking world during the period 1940-80, could be generated using the «life history» research approach.

4. Using the «life history» research approach for investigating the experience of being a lay teacher in catholic schools

As indicated at the outset, there is a particular urgency about commencing research on the situation since the 1940s as it is still possible to interview individuals who were lay teachers in Catholic schools from that point onwards. The period is also an important one to investigate in its own right since it was during the middle of it that major reforms took place within the Catholic Church (the Church) internationally (Hornsby-Smith, 2000) as a result of the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). These led to changes that shaped the present situation, including in relation to the composition of the Catholic teaching force in many countries. A major consequence is that nowadays, unlike in the past, young people being educated in

Catholic schools in many countries are usually taught by lay teachers, the principals in their schools are lay women and men, and lay people predominate on their school boards. Equally, the presence of members of religious orders of nuns, religious brothers and priests as teachers and administrators in the schools is minimal (O'Donoghue, 2004).

Very little work has been undertaken aimed at investigating the lay teachers' own perspectives on their lives in the last years of the heyday of the teaching religious and the early years when they were being rapidly replaced. What is being proposed here is that projects be conducted to seek to rectify the deficit. Also, it is being held that the most comprehensive way to begin to develop the field is to proceed on a country-by-country basis and that a fruitful way to commence work in this regard is through the use of the «life story» research approach.

At this point it is important to stress that an oral history approach is not what is being advocated. This is because such an approach reveals itself to be highly problematic; while oral sources can be valuable for studies in the history of education and in social history more broadly, what is yielded is memory, as opposed to expressions made in the past on what was experienced at the time (Atkinson, 2009). Equally, as Macmillan (2009, p. 55) has observed, we can «mistakenly think that memories are like carvings in stone; once done, they do not change». Nothing, he argues could be further from the truth; «memory is not only selective; it is malleable». In other words, we cannot conclude that just because one's memory about a situation is quite clear, that it represents accurately the way things were at the time.

Some have offered rather novel arguments for overcoming the latter limitation. Cunningham and Gardner (2004), for example, have called for the conducting of large scale projects in which we might hear over and over again fundamentally common rhythms of the experience of schooling, of expectation, and of orientation. The results of such projects, however, could not be offered as a valid representation of how people experienced their schooling. Rather, they could yield generalisations regarding how a wide variety of people remembered their experiences. Also, as Abrams (2014, p. 95) notes, «remembering is typically conducted using a memory frame, which we might describe as a locus or field which makes remembering possible». This can mean that some of our memories of specific school-related events have been constructed by comparing and contrasting them with other experiences, which often came later. Related to this is the notion that how participants construct their memories can reveal issues which, while striking for them at the time of expressing them, could only have become clear to them a considerable number of years after having left school.

Other arguments as to why analyses of memories of teaching can bring us close to what was experienced at the time are also contentious. Thompson (2000, p. 124) is persuasive in asserting that oral testimony can reveal issues on which we currently have only silences, particularly those that are «impervious to the documentary record and thus largely unrepresented in historical accounts». However, it is difficult to be persuaded by his related position that though the recollection of memory is specific to each individual life, within such recollection there is always much that speaks with a truly representative voice. It is equally difficult to be persuaded by a set of

other arguments. These include Rasmussen's (2014) point that certain studies based on teacher-produced sources, although dominated by the privileged and professionalized gaze of the teachers, make an attempt to move nearer to an understanding of the lived life of pupils by reading between the lines of what the teachers wrote. Instead, we agree with Smit (2014) that one cannot recover «the past» through memory. As De Coninck-Smith (2008) puts it, interviews on the educational experiences of people do not contain «the ultimate truth». Rather, they constitute narrative frameworks of reflections on their school years.

From the argument so far one should not conclude that there is no place for oral testimony in the endeavour to try to reconstruct what the experience of teaching was like for people. Rather, it is to use it in manner different to how it is usually used by oral historians. The view to which this view leads is built on the point made already that when conducting research in an area where the concern is with investigating issues that were of concern for participants, one needs to commence with research questions that are appropriate for getting the process underway, rather than by pursuing pre-ordained questions of interest to the researcher and which usually arise primarily from a reading of the relevant background literature only. Further, it is held that these questions can be generated from an initial investigation of people's memories of their experiences, while recognizing that at a later stage some questions may become redundant and new ones may reveal themselves, when seeking answers them through the interrogation of written historical sources. Overall, this is very much to take a social science approach to the practice.

In order to arrive at an initial set of questions of the type referred to above, it would be helpful to commence with the overall aim of exploring the «perspectives» of teachers who were lay teachers on being a lay teacher in Catholic schools from the 1940s through to the present. To phrase this aim by having «perspectives» as the core concept within it is to advocate an innovative approach of adopting symbolic interactionism as the theoretical position to underpin it. Originally based on the philosophical positions of Dewey and Mead, the fundamental principle within this sociological position, is summarized by Ritzer (1983, p. 14), is as follows:

What matters most is the way in which people, not sociologists, define their social lives. Additionally, it means that people's definitions matter as much as or more than the actual situation. If people define a given situation in a particular way, then that is what matters.

The notion of «people's definitions» referred to above is another way of talking about people's perspectives.

A particular set of definitions or perspectives that people have are those to do with their 'life stories'. A life story is «the history of an individual's life given by the person living it and solicited by the researcher» (Minichiello *et. al.*, 1991, p. 166). It makes extensive use of the in-depth interview in order to encourage participants to reveal, in their own words, their perspectives on their lives, experiences and situations (Goodson, 1992, p. 6). Accounts that emerge from the adoption of this approach are mediated by the researcher's interaction with the person during the telling of the story. Thus, one overcomes, to some extent, the problem in the

traditional autobiography, namely, that what we read is what the author wishes us to know (O'Donoghue & Brooker, 1993).

What is being proposed here is even more specific, namely, the generation of «edited» topical life stories (Denzin, 1989). This proposal is made in the light of Allport's (1942) advice that while unique styles of expression, including argot and colloquial phrasing, should remain unedited, editing for the sake of clarity or to remove repetitious material is justified. It is further proposed that, in relation to any one country, accounts should be deliberately solicited from as wide a range of individuals who taught across as wide a range of Catholic schools as possible. Also, while most participants in each project would be likely to be Catholics (at least in terms of background), it would be valuable to also recruit a small number of non-Catholics.

Achieving a gender balance amongst participants is also important. Furthermore, since «gender is a significant variable in the conduct and outcome of interviews» (Abrams, 2014, p. 97), it is important to ensure, where at all possible, that interviews with female participants be conducted by females and those with males be conducted by males. It is also important to recognize that the selection of memories and the ways in which they are narrated «can be influenced by the inter-subjective relations between the interviewer and the participant» (Abrams, 2014, p. 98). Thus, it is essential that one be aware that the memory stories that each interviewer solicits from each participant might vary somewhat if conducted by different interviewers. Also, as is made clear below, this should not be seen as a weakness.

A semi-structured interview guide would need to be prepared prior to the interviews being conducted. This could consist of questions based on the following headings suggested by Lancy (1993, p. 204) for life history work and could be focused on eliciting data regarding the perspectives which the participants held and how they carried out their work in light of these perspectives:

- family life; relationships with «significant others»;
- personal school and college history; «higher education experiences», «professional training»;
- a sense of daily routines and life-styles;
- the nature of the schools and the classroom environments in which they taught;
- classroom routines, preparation and marking of school work, management strategies, instructional modes;
- professional development activities.

The exact wording and order of the questions could be changed in each interview to enable the researcher to respond to the situation at hand and to gain new ideas on the topic.

Following the transcribing of each interview, editing should be conducted in conjunction with the participants. Each interview could be reconstructed into a first-person essay by the interviewer and then returned to the participant for reading and responses. This co-construction process should continue until each participant would arrive at an account which he or she would feel could be made public. The

final task then is to interrogate the account, develop research questions from it, and then search for sources such as diaries and letters from lay teachers to their families, friends and others, the minutes and correspondence of various teachers' association with whom lay teachers dealt, and actual accounts which lay teachers wrote and published.

5. Conclusion

This paper was stimulated by cognisance of the extent to which the history of the Catholic lay teacher internationally has been neglected in the literature. A major emphasis was on making the case for conducting projects in individual countries on the 'life stories' of lay teachers who taught in Catholic schools during the period 1940-regarding how they understood their working lives. An argument for the use of a «life story» research approach for the generation of research questions to guide such projects was also put forward. It was contended that this approach is suitable for «insider research» of the type being proposed here, where the focus is on investigating issues that were of concern for participants, rather than on pursuing pre-ordained questions of interest to the researcher and which usually arise primarily from a reading of the relevant background literature only. It is to be hoped that others will now respond to the challenge posed by this exposition.

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