

**Healy, AJ, 2000, *A Cultural Analysis Approach to Aspects of the Culture of an Irish Catholic Primary School.***

### **ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION**

This study contrasts the official ideal concept of Catholic education with the reality, identified by a cultural analysis approach, in an Irish Catholic primary school.

Traditional Church policy is outlined, emphasising in particular a desire for holistic Catholic education, the role of the teacher and the communal nature of schools. The development of the National School System, established in 1831 on a non-denominational basis, is explored.

Research highlighting the communal nature and religious effects of Catholic schools in the USA and Australia is outlined. While Catholic schools in Ireland are owned by the Catholic Church they are substantially funded by the State. In an increasingly secular society, where many parents do not desire denominational education but do not have access to an alternative State system, tensions are inevitable.

The study focuses on these tensions. Research was carried out in a *de facto* Catholic school (owned by the Catholic Church and State funded) and a *de jure* Catholic school which is owned by a Religious Order. The expectations of teachers and parents are seen as expressive symbols of the culture of these schools. While strong demand for Catholic education is identified there is significantly less support for the ideal position of the Church as outlined. Some implications of this soft support for the official Church position in increasingly secular educational and social contexts are examined.