

THE OFFICE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS HIGH SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NO 9 | JUNE 2021



TIME TO WIND DOWN...

What a year. For many of our Catholic schools the students were not on campus in person until the last quarter of the school year; for many, classrooms maintained a hybrid system throughout the year. Teachers certainly had to get creative and flexible like never before. So what can we take away from this year? (Quitting is not one of the take aways.)

It certainly would not be helpful or appropriate to tell teachers to “buck up” and learn, turn “lemons into lemonade” as we’re barely keeping above water and slugging towards the finish line. But there is some wisdom in remembering that next year will be better.

A recent *Education Week* article stated that a record number of teachers are taking a sabbatical or retiring early than in any other year. It’s no surprise – this year really took out the joy of teaching for many. However, those who are hopeful for a better 2021-22 must embrace some version of self care – at least for all of July.

In this issue of the High School Newsletter, we will discuss some ideas for how to “human” again, we will be touching on the touchy area of CRT, and citing some good research for best teaching post pandemic. This is the last issue for this year, and I hope you have a beautiful Summer Break! - JPK

SCHOOL’S OUT FOR THE SUMMER!

Should you take on summer school? How to reflect on this year?

WHAT IS CRT?

Critical Race Theory is suddenly thrust back into the spotlight – what is it and why is it controversial?

LIVING IN A POST- PANDEMIC WORLD

And what does it mean to “human” again?

To Teach or Not to Teach Summer School

Teachers are burnt out. Madeline Will wrote an op-ed piece in *EdWeek* (April 2021) about the importance of summer school, but also, the reality that teachers are tired. How can schools reconcile the needs of their students with the needs of the teachers? In short, each teacher must make that determination themselves. As Catholic school teachers, we are constantly asked to *do more* – take on more after school activities, summer programming, additional tutoring. Sometimes it is compensated (yay!) other times these “asks” thrive on a healthy level of Catholic guilt. Either way, every teacher must make the decision as to what is best for themselves. This is not the time to “give more.” Educators are done giving more. Take the time that you need to recharge and love the profession – at an OCS level we will continue to support our schools in helping staff for summer school and other activities – do not take on the burden of “more” when you really need less. And if you're feeling guilty about that and need someone to give you permission in order to have the Catholic guilt subside, you have my permission to do so. (And I'm SUPER Catholic so...#legit.)

Justyna King, Assistant Superintendent for Academic Excellence (justyna.king@seattlearch.org)

ELENA AGUILAR REFLECTS ON THE YEAR

(Originally titled “Emerging Stronger”)

“Although this school year has been exceptionally hard, and although I've experienced a great deal of insecurity about my skills, I've learned a whole lot,” says Elena Aguilar (Bright Morning Consulting) in an *Educational Leadership* article. As the school year ends, she is encouraging educators to reflect on what they've been through by answering these questions:

- What did you learn about yourself as a person this year? As a teacher, coach, leader?
- What did you learn about creating the conditions for learning?
- What did you learn about your students and colleagues?
- What did you learn about your emotions? Your resilience? What you need in order to thrive?

Three possible activities:

- Draw a simply illustrated timeline of the year with significant highs, lows, and learning moments.
- Capture on a storyboard or in dialogue boxes a few conversations that were particularly helpful and insightful.
- Describe this school year in a body movement.

Critical Race Theory – Why the Sudden Re-emergence?

When I was in teaching school at the dawn of this century (true story – I'm super old) our curriculum included a healthy dose of classroom management, curricular theory, and of course, some equity work. We each purchased a copy of Delgado and Stefancic's *Critical Race Theory* amongst other books (such as Tatum's *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, and Fong's *Culturally Competent Practice Interventions*) which discussed race as a basis for educational policy. Perhaps I was naïve, but at that time, I believed that we were utilizing these books to get a better understanding and more holistic narrative of classrooms in the United States. Now it seems, there is a mass polarization between what teachers are doing in the classroom and what kind of political backlash it gets from our communities and parents.

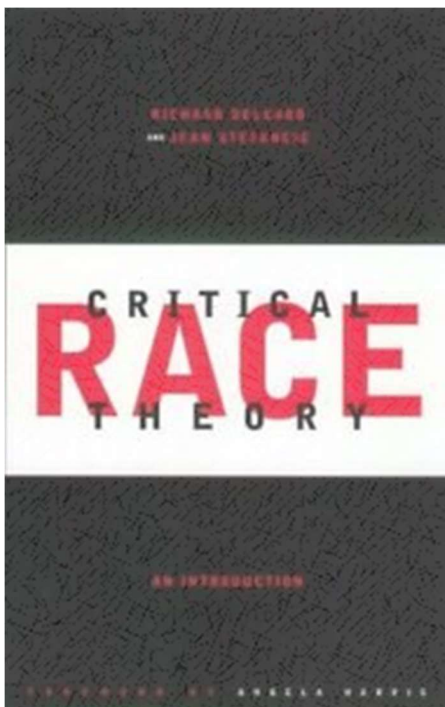
Enter: Critical Race Theory. (Or rather, re-Enter, as I mentioned this is not a new thing in education.) So why is it that every equity initiative, every diversity effort and every inclusion discussion that schools are having in our Archdiocese is being lumped into CRT?

First of all, there seems to be a mass disagreement as to what CRT even is – does it encompass everything diversity? The reality is that before Idaho and Tennessee's legislators decided to pass laws making CRT essentially “illegal to teach in schools” most people had never even heard of CRT. Also, most people still don't know what it is – but they believe it is root cause of all diversity and equity efforts in our schools.

Critical Race Theory is not new in education (see my note about how many decades ago I learned about it, above) but it is becoming a lightning rod of fear for some Catholic school communities. In short, from a pedagogical perspective, **Critical Race Theory is rooted in the idea that we educators should be aware of (critical of) the lens that is used to teach.** There are many other aspects of CRT that both supporters and oppositionists could add to that narrative, but in order to provide an overarching definition, that is how I will leave it. There is a lot of nuance in how to take that – should we be reviewing what we teach through an equity lens? What does that mean in our schools and classrooms?

If there is only one thing to come away with, it is that CRT does not encompass *everything* equity. It is not the root of every diversity effort or inclusion work. The OCS will be partnering with our Catholic schools in how to support school leaders in equity efforts and our Chancery has a Race and Diversity subcommittee that continues to work towards supporting our broader community reach. Certainly, for now, CRT is worthy of better understanding and preparing yourselves to discuss how to approach the subject when your parents inevitably ask how it fits into your own curricular goals.

Still confused? You're not alone! This is a very important point in education – let me know if you'd like to do a deeper dive into CRT and how/if it aligns with Catholic Social Teaching – we are stronger together.



From the PD Files....

MAINTAINING HIGH EXPECTATIONS IN THE FACE OF UNFINISHED LEARNING

In a *Newsweek* article, Paul Bambrick-Santoyo and Stephen Chiger (Uncommon Schools) say the best way to address the “massive instructional loss” resulting from school closings is not to lower expectations, which seems to be the argument made by some who are concerned about the emotional fragility of students as they emerge from the pandemic. Rather, say Bambrick-Santoyo and Chiger, we need to get an accurate assessment of where students are in the fall and challenge them to engage in “productive struggle.”

Consider the analogy of weightlifting, they say, where strength is built by working at the edge of one's current ability, lifting increasingly heavier weights over time. “We should not be hoping to avoid challenge this fall,” they argue. “Rather, we should embrace it, in classrooms that validate students for who they are and inspire them to take intellectual risks.”

That's the essence of equity in schools, conclude Bambrick-Santoyo and Chiger: “that all students, regardless of their race, gender, class, or anything else, have the support they need to ensure they can learn. What equity does *not* mean is lowering the bar to where students happen to be currently. Embracing equity means building a challenging curriculum, not because being difficult is inherently virtuous, but because it's good for kids.” In short, we don't have to choose between wellness and intellect.

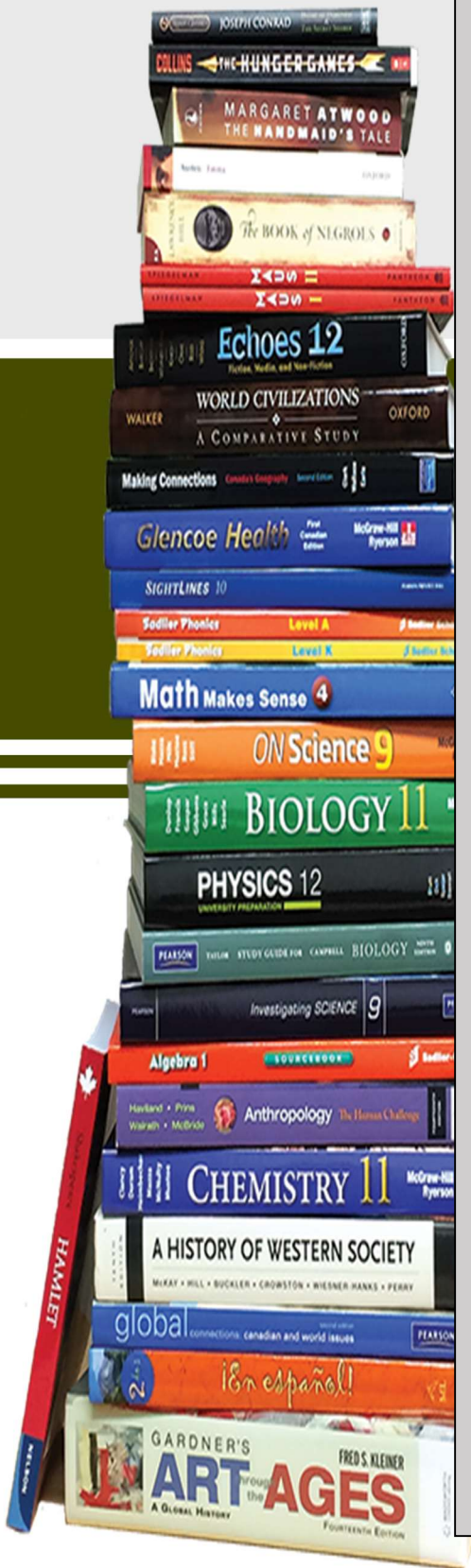
[“After the Pandemic, Schools Can't Hide from 'Learning Loss.' We Need to Embrace It”](#) by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo and Stephen Chiger in *Newsweek*, May 7, 2021; the authors can be reached at pbambrick@uncommonschoools.org and schiger@uncommonschoools.org.

Follow up...

For our Catholic High Schools – consider this idea of “unfinished learning” – how will you tackle this for 2021-22?

What have you learned about essential standards and content completion?

In essence, what are you giving up, what are you focusing in on, and what are your expectations from all students in their unfinished learning next year?



Are We Living in a Post Pandemic World?

How to *Human* Again Post-Pandemic?

One of my personal developments during the pandemic is that I began listening to podcasts while going for long walks in the morning. This allowed me to do something that I would enjoy (listening to fun podcasts) while doing something that was good for me (exercising and spending some time in fresh air). This has been my routine for many weeks now, and it is literally what gets me out of bed in the morning (ok, also, a screaming baby... but that's another story). So it was a strange feeling one morning when I was asked to attend, in person a staff retreat last week. What took me aback was my visceral reaction to being amongst a large group of people again (large in this case meaning about a dozen, masked and socially distanced in an old Catholic church).

In a May 14th NPR podcast entitled “*How to Human Again: Advice for a Post Pandemic Life*” from their *Consider This* series, Dr. Lucy McBride and Ekemini Uwan talked about the transition into a post-pandemic world. Although teachers have been back on campus for quite a while, the switch to in person school and teaching amongst other humans certainly came with a high level of anxiety and trepidation. What will the rest of our daily lives look like now that the CDC has come out and said that we’re on track for a pre-pandemic reality again?

It's a fantastic 13 minute listen, if you're inclined, however to summarize, here are some main points:

Boundaries are important – you can establish your own personal boundaries in way that once may have made you feel like a social pariah. Decide what you're comfortable with and have honest conversations with people around you – is it ok to ask someone whether they have been vaccinated before choosing to interact with them? Can you ask others who are not yet vaccinated to wear a mask around you? Can you simply say “no” to large gatherings? The answer to all of those, of course, is YES.

Also, consider the emotional toll of entering back into the world full throttle. It is well documented that many of us have come out of the pandemic less eager to be around people all of the time. These last fifteen months or so have made more of us attune with our inner-hermit. That is perfectly ok. Dr. McBride and Uwan go on to say that just like you wouldn't jump into a marathon training without warming up, it is ok to decide to decline a party invite to a large social event. Ease in slowly and decide for yourself, how to best “human” again.

Post-Pandemic Professional Development Opportunity Alert!

Because I'm really good at reading the room and know that the first thing on your mind is how to add to your teaching load for 2021-22, I would like to re-emphasize that the OCS is looking for Accreditation Team members for the 2021-22 school year. This is one of the best kinds of PD that a teacher can get! We have an online registration system for applying – please see your principal for more details! We would LOVE to have you on a team!

Archbishop Etienne has released the new Pastoral Plan,
entitled:

KNOWING JESUS CHRIST, EMBRACING HIS MISSION.

Exploring the Focus Areas: At the heart of our mission is a relationship with Jesus Christ. The pastoral planning focus areas are intended to help all Catholics re-examining and renew their relationship with Jesus. They are intentionally broad so that particular goals and actions may be developed according to the unique circumstances, gifts and callings of each person, family, parish, school and ministry

These are the focus and values of the new Archdiocese of Seattle pastoral planning process, "Knowing Jesus Christ, Embracing his Mission":

Focus

- Encounter Jesus Christ and one another.
- Accompany each other, as one human family, on the journey of discipleship.
- Live the unconditional love and joy of the Gospel.

Values

- Faith in Action
- Hope in Resurrection
- Truth in Love
- Unity in Diversity

What can I do? Archbishop Paul D. Etienne is inviting all Catholics in the Archdiocese of Seattle to go deeper in their relationship with Jesus. While people can encounter Christ in many ways, here are a few simple steps to help guide you in your journey to encounter the Lord and share his love and joy with others.

THANK YOU FOR A BEAUTIFUL YEAR, FRIENDS!

I'm not typically a sappy kind of person (I blame my Eastern European disposition and a semi-dead soul) but I have been so inspired by the teachers at our Catholic high schools this year. Not only were you asked to do the impossible many times this year (change schedules, teach online and in person, (sometimes at the same time); tend to the emotional needs of teenagers during a world wide pandemic while also putting aside the weight of your own personal needs and realities, etc. etc.) you did so with grace, humor, and probably a little bit of faith.

As I wrap up my first year at the Office for Catholic Schools, I cannot imagine how I would have been able to navigate this crazy reality in a secular environment. I've asked many different saints for grace and patience; I prayed with my colleagues when we needed collective understanding; heck, I was even able to put a Christmas Tree icon on my newsletter this year. In-sane.

I am so thankful for all of you and what you do in our schools. I hope that one day I can meet each and every one of you (not a big deal as I think I only have eight readers of this newsletter anyway) and know that we can have a beverage, a laugh, and toast to Catholic education.

Justyna Plichta King, Ed.D
Assistant Superintendent of
Academic Excellence



ARCHDIOCESE OF SEATTLE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS 2020-2021

#ignitinghope

