

CURRICULUM COURIER

Special Edition: Social-Emotional Learning

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A Letter from the CSO... Before You Go, by Cathy Stephen Assistant Superintendent for Operational Vitality



Before you go, there are a few more things to do! Whether it is your first year or fifteenth, reflecting on the highs and lows of the year can bring some much needed perspective in May. Sports teams always recognize rookies for their effort, performance, and spirit on the team. Who would you nominate for Rookie of the Year? Yourself, perhaps? Think of ways to celebrate others. Show investment and give those much-needed encouragements.

There's plenty to do before you go! You want to be known as someone who manages their classroom well with quality instruction. Remember to "run through the finish line" as you teach to the last bell. Even cleaning up the classroom and collecting textbooks too early shows signs that there is no more to learn here, so continue to focus on learning objectives from now until that last bell. When that last day of the year comes, find true rest and relaxation. Consider great ways to spend your time this summer. Sit poolside, read a novel or a book that enhances your work, plan family travel! There is so much to see here in Houston, so even a daytrip to a historical location, a museum or a park can bring joy. Summer travels can enhance your lessons next year!

We know that teachers live out their faith each day in the classroom. What you do from now until the end of the year has great importance. The summertime of rest and renewal offers spiritual refreshment and even healing as you reflect back on the great work of this school year. Thank you for sharing your gifts with the students and families that you serve.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

By Deena Wolf, Instructional Specialist at St. Mary of the Purification Catholic School

As teachers and instructional specialists, most of us have participated in workshops and seminars on culturally responsive pedagogy and brain-based learning. Many times we feel that the two do not intersect; however, if we look at both approaches together, we can better recognize that instructional practices that are culturally responsive have an effect on student learning. How many of us make a conscious effort to choose books written by authors from different cultures? Or how many of us ensure that our classroom environments are safe places for our students by displaying posters, pictures, and artwork showcasing their cultures and backgrounds? When mediating a "Socratic seminar" do we choose topics that are relevant and meaningful to all students? While these practices may seem minor and overlooked by some, the impact it has on our students is profound. We are blessed to be part of an archdiocese that is both culturally and linguistically diverse. Our responsibility as educators is to recognize our students' cultural displays of learning and to make lessons relevant by responding with instructional practices that use their cultural knowledge. If we make an effort to incorporate our students' culture into our instruction and our classroom environments, we will also build stronger relationships while promoting a social-emotional connection. Research has shown that culturally responsive education can strengthen student connectedness with school and enhance learning (Hammond, 2015). No one teaching strategy will consistently engage all learners. The key is helping students relate lessons to their own backgrounds. When students can see that what they are learning makes sense and is relevant, their intrinsic motivation emerges.

Four Conditions Necessary for Culturally Responsive Teaching

- 1. Establish Inclusion:** Emphasize the human purpose of what is being learned and its relationship to the students' experience. Share the ownership of knowing with all students. Collaborate and cooperate. The class assumes a hopeful view of people and their capacity to change. Treat all students equitably.
- 2. Develop Positive Attitudes:** Relate teaching and learning activities to students' experience or previous knowledge. Encourage students to make choices in content and assessment methods based on their experiences, values, needs, and strengths.
- 3. Enhance Meaning:** Provide challenging learning experiences involving higher order thinking and critical inquiry. Address relevant, real-world issues in an action-oriented manner. Encourage discussion of relevant experiences. Incorporate student dialect into classroom dialogue.
- 4. Engender Competence:** Connect the assessment process to the students' world, frames of reference, and values. Include multiple ways to represent knowledge and skills and allow for attainment of outcomes at different points in time. Encourage self-assessment.

St. Martha Catholic School

Teacher Book Study:

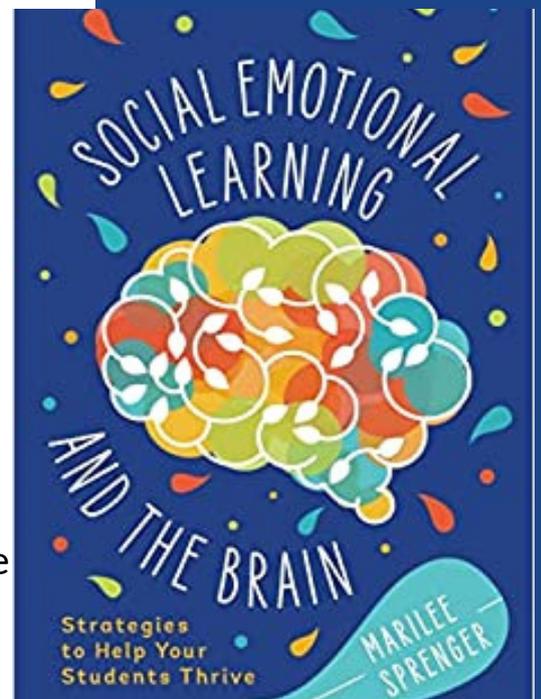
Social Emotional Learning and the Brain

By **Simona McKinney,**

Counselor at St. Martha Catholic School

In the 2021-2022 school year, Saint Martha Catholic School participated in a book study: **Social-Emotional Learning and the Brain by Marilee Sprenger**. The staff read the book over the 2021 summer break and in August gathered on campus to review their learning. The book study supported teachers in providing a positive Catholic school experience for their students, specifically addressing the whole child through mind, body, and spirit.

In support of the new **Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston Comprehensive Developmental Guidance Program** the teaching staff excavated a deeper understanding of building teacher-student relationships through self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. The staff divided into groups and dissected each chapter and shared their discoveries and viewpoints. During group sessions, teachers were heard saying, "This is something I have been doing in my classroom for years!" or "I can't wait to try this on the first week of school!" Organizing a book study for the summer elevated our teachers understanding of the importance of understanding the student mind and how it affects learning. This book provides clear and easy to understand explanations of brain activity and dozens of specific strategies for all grade levels. **Social Emotional Learning and the Brain** is an essential guide to creating supportive classroom environments and improving outcomes for students. The positive impact of the strategies this book has provided is supporting our Catholic school mission in forming our future disciples.



Corpus Christi Implements SEL with Student Ambassadors

By Dr. Mazie McCoy,

Principal at Corpus Christi Catholic School

Corpus Christi Catholic School (CCCS) teachers have partnered with the counseling department of the University of St. Thomas (UST) to pilot a social emotional learning (SEL) professional development program. The specific focus is on the **CASEL** Competencies of self-management, relationship skills, social awareness, curiosity and having an open mind. Realizing that students may be experiencing a higher level of anxiety due to current events such as the pandemic, an increase in violence, and the Russia/Ukraine War, CCCS teachers are utilizing the SEL strategies learned to enhance their guidance curriculum.

CCCS teachers recently participated in 2 sessions presented by the UST counseling department. The first session presented scenarios of what the **CASEL** competencies look like in the classroom setting and made teachers aware of how to identify stress and anxiety among their students. The second session focused on social awareness and decision making. Teachers learned valuable information to help guide students' thinking and behavior. "The questioning techniques are a good way to help students become more reflective of their behavior", attests Mrs. Jean Marie McMorran, 3rd grade teacher.

Student ambassadors were privileged to partake in a training with UST Counseling Department as well. Their SEL training was a follow-up to the faculty's training, but geared towards youth. The student leaders took their knowledge gained regarding responsible decision making to collaborate with the school principal, Dr. McCoy, and school counselor, Mrs. Born, to develop a school-wide plan for students to reflect upon their actions and decisions. The student ambassadors will introduce the plan to the student body in hopes to foster empathy among all students.

Corpus Christi Catholic School is grateful to the counseling department of the University of St. Thomas for volunteering their time and talents to nurture the mind, heart and spirit of our scholars.

On-line Ambassador Training



CCCS Student Ambassadors



Catholic Teacher Resource

By Janay O'Connor, Counselor
St. Anne Catholic School in Tomball

After researching many different Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs, teachers at St. Anne Catholic School-Tomball began implementing the **Catholic Teacher Resource** SEL program. This Catholic faith-based SEL program provides students with tools to learn about our faith, as well as skills to become true followers of Christ. The program has been very well received by our faculty and students, as it combines vital social-emotional competencies with Catholic-centered teachings. The program is easy for our teachers to use and includes many resources and extension activities. Teachers love the flexibility of being able to teach a mini-lesson or go more in-depth with a concept using the extensions offered based on the needs of their students. One teacher noted a positive impact from the Catholic Teacher Resource's SEL program, saying: "This program helps our students to develop stronger social-emotional skills and a deeper relationship with each other and God."

Now, more than ever before, our students need to be equipped to navigate the uncertainties of life. We love how this program combines social-emotional learning with an emphasis on our Catholic faith, building strong, compassionate, and resilient disciples of Christ!



Kindergarten-Ms. Nix works on an SEL lesson on Identifying Your Emotions.



Second grade-Mrs. Rathe introduces the Catholic Teacher Resource SEL program to her students.



Third grade-Mrs. West works on an SEL lesson on Responsible Decision Making

Are you in "The Zone?"

by Lois Goudeau, Principal at St. Mary of the Purification Catholic School

Every teacher knows the challenge of presenting a lesson that students can sink their teeth into. We plan, we imagine the students listening, completing the tasks we put before them with excitement, and we present our material only to find that our students are less than enthusiastic. They also don't grasp the concept of what we are trying to teach. That moment makes us feel like we failed our students. We begin thinking, "what went wrong?" We know that one plus one equals two, but what did we do to prove that to our students? Did we actually get two objects and demonstrate that we now have two objects when we add one object to the other object, or did we simply write one plus one equals two on the board? This is a simplistic example of going from a good lesson to a great one. Have you ever just placed objects on your students' desk before their arrival, then let them walk in, sit down, and explore? If so, what did you notice? Instant curiosity, involvement, discussion, and buy-in for sure. "Contemporary educational researchers promote a myriad of conceptual models and approaches falling under inquiry-based learning and genuine knowledge creation" (Friesen & Scott, 2013). The term inquiry finds its way into curriculum documents and mission statements, but it is less prominent in language arts programs (Friesen & Scott, 2013).

The seminal psychologist Lev Vygotsky believed that parents, caregivers, peers, and the culture at large are responsible for developing higher-order functions (Cherry, 2022). He thought that we are all born with certain barriers to learning. Cultural development determines how we navigate past those barriers. Vygotsky calls these navigation methods "tools of intellectual adaptation" (Cherry, 2022). Children use these tools to help them adapt to their environment. This theory of development is the basis for the Zone of Proximal Development concept. Vygotsky describes this as "the distance between the actual development level (of the learner) as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers." When our students enter the classroom, we have the ultimate responsibility for providing the tools that allow them to break through those learning barriers that keep them from understanding the material being taught and gain intellectual adaptation. By providing an opportunity for natural curiosity to lead to inquiry, we give the prospect of learning. Inquiry offers an experience, and according to Merriam-Webster, an experience is a direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge. By standing by and observing the inquiry process, we can assess students' skill levels and determine where to begin instruction. This allows us to offer education that stretches the limits of each child's capabilities (Cherry, 2022). The more we offer these opportunities for inquiry, the more we expand the zone of proximal development. Cherry provides some additional examples of ways to grow the zone of proximal development:

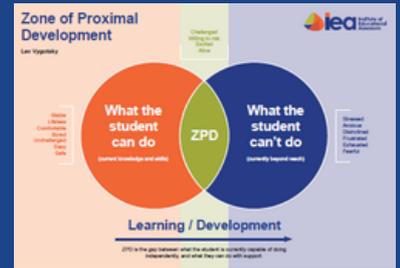
• **Planning and organizing classroom instruction and lessons.** For example, teachers may organize the class into groups where less-skilled children are paired with students with a higher skill level.

• **Using hints, prompts, and direct instruction** to help kids improve their ability levels.

• **Scaffolding**, where the teacher provides specific prompts to move the child progressively forward toward a goal.

While Vygotsky's theories have a following, some disagree with the specifics of this development. He believed that higher mental function could be developed through sensitive instruction and guidance. Further, he thought that interaction with peers could effectively develop skills and learning strategies. Vygotsky suggests that teachers use cooperative learning experiences to help develop the skills of less competent learners by interacting with more skilled peers (McLeod, 2020).

"Vygotsky believed everything is learned on two levels. First, through interaction with others, and then integrated into the individual's mental structure" (McLeod, 2020). By adopting the teaching styles that envelop this more student-centered instruction, we can support the process of higher-order thinking. By improving students' ability to learn, a student's zone of proximal development increases, but we improve their ability to take on knowledge. "Teachers and students collaborate in learning and practicing four key skills: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting. The teacher's role in the process is reduced over time" (McLeod, 2020).



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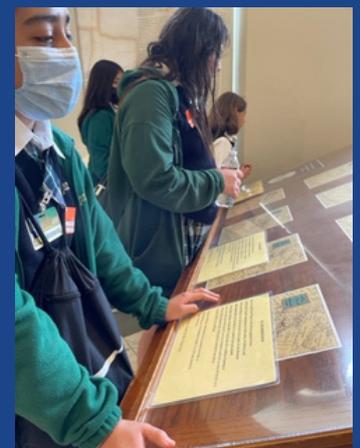
St. Christopher Takes Over Austin!

By Jessica Moreno,

Instructional Specialist at St. Christopher Catholic School



What a treat! Texas' First Lady Cecilia Abbott visited St. Christopher Catholic School during Catholic Schools Week to revisit her old stomping grounds. Mrs. Abbott was the principal during the 1995-1996 school year. When she visited this year, she was able to tour the school again and fondly reminisce with old colleagues. She spoke to the students about her time at the school, her adventure in relocating to Austin, and how she continues to praise strong Catholic values tied to Catholic education. Students listened eagerly as she shared stories and memories. As a parting tribute, Mrs. Abbott, invited our middle school students to visit her in Austin, Texas and explore the Governor's Mansion. Fortunately, we were able to make this happen! Last month, we loaded up a group of our middle school students and headed to Austin! The tour of the mansion was rich in history and fun facts. After the tour, the group had lunch at a nearby park. Returning to campus, they felt truly honored to have been part of such a unique experience. In reflecting on the event, our graduating 8th graders have a special memory to make sure their time spent at St. Christopher Catholic School is not forgotten. We continue to grow up and move on but our time together is our most cherished memory. Our students, staff, faculty, and community know that once a Traveler, always a Traveler.



Vocations...It's a Matter of the Heart!

By Barb White, former Catholic school principal,
and mother of Fr. Joseph White

Nine years ago, an 18-year-old young man went to God in prayer. As he was discerning his future career, college plans and God's will he heard God calling him to go to the adoration chapel every day. The young man followed God's calling. One particular day, while in adoration he heard the Lord knock on his heart's door. He opened the door receiving the Lord into a conversation. "Lord, what vocation do you have for me?" He heard the Lord reply, "Consider the Priesthood!" The young man recognized the Lord's voice and remembered His great love for him. Therefore, he was able to say, "I will!" Once the words fell from his lips an incredible peace overcame him. He recognized it as God's indescribable grace and mercy. The young man continued to take steps toward God's calling. He visited the seminary, spoke with a vocations director and started meeting with a Spiritual Director. Hearing from God and having the courage to act were fostered by an understanding that his life, and heart, were to be given to God as a gift. The gift of his heart and life were the foundation of his vocation. Discerning how to do that would further define it.

As Catholic educators we hold a great key to unlocking the mysteries of God while guiding our students to their true calling from Him. We are able to freely guide students to know, love, and serve God throughout the entire day. What a beautiful platform of training for our students to receive! When the question of "What should I be when I grow up?" presents itself, we can guide them to keep listening to the quiet, still voice of our God who loves them and has a plan for them. When God knocks at the door of their hearts, they will want to open it! They will trust the voice and answer the call. It is in daily drawing nearer to God that a child learns to love, depend on and hear God's voice directing them in the way to go. When a high school student receives this guidance, training and lifestyle as a child, seeking God's will for their life after graduation is not ambiguous. The student knows God's voice through years of prayer, scripture study, attendance at mass, adoration and reception of the Eucharist. It is recognizable to them when God opens the door to their vocation; whether it be to be a priest, religious life, married or the single life. With Mary as the Mother of Vocations let us join in the great commission of guiding our students to draw near to the heart of Jesus.

So, what happened to the young man in the story who answered the knock at the door of his heart? You guessed it! He is now Father Joseph White. Fr. Joseph entered the seminary at the University of Dallas, then traveled to Rome to complete his studies in theology. He was ordained a deacon in June of 2020. One year later, during the year of St. Joseph, and on his 26th birthday, Fr. Joseph was ordained a priest! My husband and I are most grateful for the gift of a son as a priest and in addition, for the gift of two other sons who have followed their calling to be husbands and fathers. God knows where he needs each of us in this world to serve Him. We are His hands and feet!



**Fr. Joseph White
returns to Houston
in July to serve the
Archdiocese of
Galveston-Houston**

**Looking for
resources to
promote vocations?**



www.vocationministry.com

<https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/parents/top-ten-things-to-promote-vocations>

Prayer for the End of the School Year

At the end of this school year we
give thanks to God:

For all the teaching and learning
that has taken place in our school,
both in and out of the classroom.

For the talents and gifts that have
been shared and the challenges that
have been faced.

For the burdens that have been
lifted and the hurts that have been healed.
For the respect and care that has been given.

We give thanks for the friendships
that have just begun and for those
that have grown.

For the faith that has been lived in
our daily struggles.

For the hope that has lifted our
hearts on the dark days
and for the love that has kept us going.

We give thanks for the community
that we are, and we ask you Lord -
Bless our students as they sit for their
exams: may your Spirit inspire
them with confidence and calmness.

Bless our families as we take our
holidays, may our time together
leave us with memories to cherish.

Pour out your love on us that we
may return renewed and refreshed
to continue our journey together .

We make this prayer through
Christ our Lord. Amen.



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