

## Re-envisioning the Framework for Teaching and Learning *Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois*

The Department for Catholic Education encourages educators across all settings to:

- Integrate subjects
- Elevate topics and teaching to focus on the Good, the True, and the Beautiful
- Orient all things to Christ, as the Way, the Truth, and the Light

*Sample Exercise:* for the objects in the image below, how many different human disciplines, arts, and sciences were brought together to fashion them? Realizing the confluence of the many branches of knowledge and technologies involved, how might we teach about them in a way that reflects integration, elevation, and orientation to Christ?



# Integration, Elevation, and Orientation of School Curricula

## *Beyond the Dewey Paradigm*

The current field of Education in America is founded on the ideas of John Dewey, an Atheist. The key aspects of this approach to teaching are learning are:

- **Fragmented** – Education is separated by topic into non-overlapping subjects. Specialization of fields means that students are learning a lot of non-related concepts at the same time with little or no organizing schema for the school year. Fixation on state standards, methods, and curricula reinforce this mindset for teachers and students.
- **Materialist** – by emphasizing “college and career readiness,” we are preaching a “Prosperity Gospel” of materialism to our children, whether we realize it or not. When pressed about why they have to learn difficult concepts, we tell them that they need to know the information in order to get into a good high school or college. Then what? So that you can complete a degree, to land a good job, to earn money, to acquire stuff. Without meaning to, we essentially communicate to students that being able to acquire stuff is the goal of human life. Tragically, however, too many learn too late, that stuff cannot make us happy, ultimately.
- **Utilitarian** – academic topics are taught as ends in themselves, with computer programming, chemistry, and biology presented as possible career fields that are morally neutral. These and similar subjects are touted as means to a fulfilling life, with very little discussion about ethics and morality as guiding or infusing a profession or one’s life as a whole. Questions of ultimate meaning, of what is good, true, and beautiful – what will maximize our service to our fellow human beings, to help get us to Heaven and union with God – are bracketed out of the equation.

## *An Education for Wisdom*

Teachers, like parents, have the beautiful and terrifying call to help flawed young people struggling with the effects of original sin, learn how to become great human beings. This cannot be accomplished with an instructional model that is fractured, low, and lacks an orientation point higher than materiality, productivity, and money.

For all of these reasons, our model for the renewal of Catholic curricula in Springfield Diocese is founded on three key principles, that are actually the inverse of the Dewey and State approach:

- **Integration** of subjects to facilitate interdisciplinary teaching and learning.
- **Elevation** of subjects to show that the creativity and artistic abilities of human beings reveal their attraction to the true, the good, and the beautiful. This demonstrates that we are indeed made in the image and likeness of God and therefore have a special role to play in Creation. Unlike other material creatures, we actively participate in the process of becoming a higher or lower being.
- **Orientation** of topics to Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the light – utilizing the material to make the lives of humans better or more beautiful, and turning them to means to serve and praise of God as the giver of all that we have, and all that we are, as human beings.

One approach to these ends is to start by sequencing the teaching of History by eras, and then integrating Art, Literature, and Science for each academic year.

Currently, your Fifth Grade students may be learning about the Civil Rights Era in History, reading “Beowulf” in Literature, studying metals in Science class, and doing Crayon Resist images in Art. In this model, none of the subjects reinforces any other area of learning. Everything is presented as information that a student needs to learn.

Imagine how much more engaging and coherent it would be for these students to have the Middle Ages as their period of study in History, while reading “The Song of Roland” in Literature, exploring the pigments, dyes, and collative agents Medieval Monks mastered in Science, while applying that knowledge to the making of illuminated manuscript pages in Art class.

In the second model, topics are integrated, elevated, and oriented to Christ. Students are given a whole picture of an era of history. By reinforcing different aspects of the same period, students are likely to care more about their own religious and cultural heritage. The material is deliberately brought to serve the transcendent. Their studies are purposeful, coherent, and interdisciplinary by nature, through this approach.