Catholic Theological and Equity Framework to Champion Hispanic Representation in Catholic Schools

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Abstract: How do Catholic schools create inclusive, equitable environments that embrace the identities of their students, including their race, ethnicity, and culture? What does Catholic theological spirituality say about diversity, equity, and inclusion to address racism? What is the connection between Catholic theological spirituality and equitable school practices to bring about equity in Catholic schools? In response to increased diversity of students, educators, communities, and societal challenges, there is a need for a framework for Catholic schools with a culturally diverse student body, or with a student body and staff with different cultures. We synthesize Catholic theological spirituality and research about equity in public and Catholic schools to create a framework for Catholic school educators in their support of students whose cultural identity is different from the faculty and staff. The framework uses Catholic theological spirituality and equitable school practices to promote equity in Catholic schools using equitable school practices.

Keywords: equity framework, Hispanic, instruction, Catholic schools, Catholic theology

How are Catholic schools creating inclusive, equitable environments that embrace the identities of their students, including their race, ethnicity, and culture? What does the Catholic theological spirituality say about diversity, equity, and inclusion to address racism? What is the connection between Catholic theological spirituality and equitable practices in Catholic schools? These questions are relevant to Catholic schools serving Hispanic students because of the challenges schools face when creating anti-racist, inclusive, and equitable environments. Children who experience punitive disciplinary actions in school exhibit lower academic achievement on

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average, and poverty and school level factors account for a significant share of the racial discipline gap between White and Hispanic students (Gopalan & Ashlyn, 2019). Such challenges interfere with creating a school culture and climate that fosters equity for each student. However, the mission of Catholic schools includes the call to work for systemic changes that make just institutions. According to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,* "social institutions do not of themselves guarantee as if automatically, the common good; the internal 'renewal of the Christian spirit' must precede the commitment to improve society" (Pontifical Council, 2004, p. 240). In response to the increased diversity of students, educators, communities, and societal challenges, there is a need for a framework for Catholic schools with culturally diverse student bodies or staff.

We synthesize Catholic theological spirituality and research about equity in public and Catholic schools to create a framework for Catholic school educators. In the educational context, equity includes equality of opportunity, justice as fairness, individual differences/capabilities and redistribution, and the consideration of the consequences of unequal education. The framework uses Catholic theological spirituality and equitable school practices to promote equity in Catholic schools. To provide an illustrative example of how the equity framework applies to Catholic schools, we focus on schools with a student body that predominantly identifies as Hispanic. We focus on Hispanic identity and culture because the percentage of people identifying as a Hispanic ethnic group in the United States has grown to 18% (U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts, 2020). In the last five years, Catholic schools have experienced enrollment increases from Hispanic families; however, the majority of the Catholic school faculty often does not share the same cultural background as their Hispanic-identifying students (Ospino & Wyttenbach, 2022).

The Hispanic community is diverse, including a Spanish-speaking background and ethnic roots in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, or Central and South American Spanish-speaking countries. Hispanic families may gravitate toward Catholic schools because of high academic standards, safe environments, religious education, and the availability of after-school activities and college or post-secondary preparation options (National Catholic Educational Association [NCEA], 2018). Community members express that students in high-poverty schools are less likely to receive a sound primary education because they provide less access to school resources that positively impact them (Oakes et al., 2021). Hispanic families may experience challenges or feelings of isolation when communication between the school and the family breaks down. Some Catholic schools have been willing to embrace the culture of families who identify as Hispanic, but many have experienced challenges moving from superficial to deep levels of change (Ospino & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2016).

National academic achievement data from Catholic schools also reveal that across grade levels and Catholic school contexts, achievement gaps persist for Hispanic students at a scale nearly mirroring similarly observed trends in public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.; NWEA, n.d.). Although these data sets do not necessarily explain the reason for these

achievement gaps, we see the trends in academic performance as an opportunity to interpret problems of practice related to this trend through an equity lens. For example, we see the pattern of teacher-student race matching as relevant to these performance trends, given their roots in ensuring equitable representation and the growing body of evidence suggesting a wide range of positive, significant impacts on academic, socioemotional, and behavioral outcomes for students (Blazar, 2021; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Grissom et al., 2017; Weisman et al., 2007). Moreover, Hispanic students receive significantly more favorable evaluations from Hispanic teachers who share the same native language than Hispanic teachers who speak a different native language or non-Hispanic teachers (Seah, 2021). An equity framework for Catholic schools allows practitioners and researchers to reinterpret problems of practice in a way that allows for novel insights and enduring shifts in practice and policy while holding fast to the purpose and aspirations of Catholic education.

The subsequent sections of this article begin with an exploration of relevant concepts of human dignity, Catholic social teaching, and the Catholic Church's teachings on the purpose of Catholic schools as it relates to potentially parallel concepts of educational equity in PK-12 schooling contexts, then continues with a brief, highlighted overview of contemporary examinations of equity in educational contexts in PK-12 schools across the United States (U.S.). This paper articulates a framework for examining equity in Catholic schools through descriptions of equitable practices within schools as well as illustrative examples connecting the equity framework to the salient issue of Hispanic representation in Catholic schools. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of implications for researchers and practitioners, including recommended lines of inquiry for scholars interested in problems of practice that intersect with the Catholic school context.

Theological Foundations

The Catholic concept of "human dignity" has its roots in Genesis 1:27, which tells the story of God's creation of human beings in His image and likeness, a theological term referred to as the *imago Dei*. The imago Dei and the beliefs and teachings on the dignity of the human person form the basis of the Catholic Church's teachings on Christian anthropology. Notably, a related concept of "human dignity," albeit without any reference to a larger metaphysical or theological framework, appears in the United Nations (U.N.) charter of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948). As Reginald (2017) notes, the U.N.'s assertion of the equal and inherent dignity of the human person and subsequent rights and privileges conferred at birth parallels the concept of human dignity as articulated in Christian anthropology.

These similarities are a vital launching point for establishing meaningful connections between Catholic theology and contemporary social justice issues, most notably as Christian anthropology is a key component of Catholic social teaching as a response to contemporary social issues. As Thompson (2018) notes in a pastoral letter on the fundamentals of Christian anthropology, the respect for the "transcendent dignity" of the human person forms the basis for how one should

respond to contemporary societal challenges, including racism. Catholic social teaching, rooted in Christian anthropology, also includes solidarity as one of its central aspects. Clark (2019) asserts that Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI's examination and description of solidarity is that Catholic social teaching leads to an attitude of interdependence, an imposition of subsequent moral obligations, and the virtue of "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good" (John Paul II, 1998, para. 38). Subsidiarity, alongside human dignity and solidarity, constitutes the final leg of what John Paul II (1999) calls the "threefold cornerstone" that links Catholic social teaching with the principle of the common good.

Given the centrality of Catholic schools and education in "the saving mission of the Church," it is no surprise that Christian anthropology and the imago Dei feature heavily in the Church's teachings and writings on Catholic schools. In *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1998), the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education writes,

> The Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons. The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school. (para. 9)

Archbishop J. Michael Miller (2006) includes Christian anthropology as one of the five non-negotiables of a Catholic school's religious identity and also references *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982) in suggesting that the Christian anthropological foundation of a Catholic school extends a set of duties and responsibilities to educators within such schools that exist in today's pluralistic world. The God-given dignity of the human person and its educational implications also manifests themselves in other Catholic educational traditions; for example, the Jesuit value of *cura personalis* refers to both holistic education that is attentive to spiritual, moral, and intellectual development and the demand to provide education that is respectful of the unique needs and identity of each student (Geger, 2014).

Contemporary writings and teachings from leaders within the Catholic Church engage with modern considerations of diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as the facets of society that impact the expression of those considerations. St. John Paul the Great's encyclical *Solicitudo Rei Socialis* (1988), which acknowledged the impact of the promulgation of the Declaration above on Human Rights, articulated the need for attentiveness to "structures of sin." It notably parallels the concept of systemic or institutionalized injustice (Carmichael et al., 1992), as these structures are "influences and obstacles which go far beyond the brief life span of an individual . . . overcome only through the exercise of human and Christian solidarity" (John Paul II, 1987, para. 40). *Evangelii Gaudium* (Francis, 2014) affirms diversity as integral to the expression of "genuine catholicity." Justice is one of the cardinal virtues the Catechism of the Catholic Church enumerates, describing it as a disposition

"to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good" (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 1997, para. 1807).

Notably, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2018) contains numerous explicit calls to recognize and address racism in many ways and frames. In particular, the USCCB document links racism to ignorance of the core teaching of Christian anthropology. Additionally, the authors include an explicit charge to build educational responses to address racism and direct readers to be attentive to policies and institutional barriers. The document, published nearly forty years after a previous USCCB pastoral letter, *Brothers and Sisters to Us* (USCCB, 1979), acknowledged the following:

> Today in our country men, women, and children are being denied opportunities for full participation and advancement in our society because of their race. The educational, legal, and financial systems, along with other structures and sectors of our society, impede people's progress and narrow their access because they are black, Hispanic, Native American, or Asian. (p. 3)

In 2004, the USCCB commissioned a research report on the 25th anniversary of *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, wherein a research team advanced seven critical findings based on an examination of the recommendations of the original pastoral letter. Cavendish (2004) found that White Catholics "over the last twenty-five years exhibit diminished, rather than increased, support for government policies aimed at reducing racial inequality" (p. 2) and that Black student enrollment in Catholic schools declined during the same period in which Hispanic and Asian American student enrollment increased.

The development of contemporary Catholic social thought provides an opportunity for a more inclusive consideration of discussions of equity, diversity, and inclusion that too often exist solely in secular spaces and are sometimes dismissed as external or even antithetical to mainstream or orthodox expressions of faith. Conversely, the richness of Catholic social teaching and its inherent desire to engage with contemporary societal concerns presents an invitation to extend such considerations toward Catholic schools, both in their role in the Church's work within society, as well as their internal culture and structure.

Existing Equity Research

In order to better ground an understanding and analysis of issues of Hispanic representation as theologically-motivated equity considerations, what follows is a brief overview of the existing scholarship on equity (primarily as it is seen in secular spaces). Subsequent sections will rely on such an overview of equity practices to substantiate the viability of an equity framework for Catholic schools and surface alignment between equity practices related to Hispanic representation in Catholic schools.

Drawing initially from Jacob and Holsinger's (2008) definition of equity, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2018) identifies several fundamental principles and frameworks relevant to the application of equity to the educational context, including equality of opportunity, justice as fairness, individual differences/capabilities and redistribution, and the consideration of the consequences of unequal education. Other efforts have been made to more concretely define the ultimate ends of equity in education; as an example, Barth (2016) sees equity as "achieved when all students receive the resources they need so they graduate prepared for success after high school" (p. 1). Empirical research that considers equity in education uses the term "equity" as a descriptor of particular practices or aspects within education contexts (e.g., equity-oriented leadership or equitable schools) or about a particular set of outcomes deemed desirable (e.g., achievement equity or equity of opportunity).

Darling-Hammond and Friedlander (2008) identify three elements of school design that characterize equitable schools: personalization, rigorous and relevant instruction, and professional learning and collaboration. Additionally, they articulate four policy areas that influence equitable outcomes for traditionally marginalized student populations: organization and governance, human capital, curriculum and assessment, and funding. Ayscue and Siegel-Hawley's (2019) study of schools participating in the 2010 federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program grant unearthed additional depth to policy areas and areas of leverage for school transformation for more equitable outcomes (e.g., family interest and enrollment) while identifying common challenges in these school contexts to equity-oriented change (e.g., shared ownership, lack of staff diversity, identification of students for advanced/gifted and talented courses). Similar to these two studies, Oakes et al. (2021) situate examination of equitable schools and equitable education in low-income communities that are traditionally marginalized and systemically disadvantaged; here, researchers affirmed that resource allocation within schools, out-of-school conditions, and other systemic factors were critical considerations for policy making. The complexity and depth of necessary and sufficient factors for enacting equity in schools are apparent; as an example, Bottiani et al. (2017) found in their examination of equitable and supportive school climate in high schools that instruction and promotion of explicitly equitable teacher and staff practices can fall short of the desired impact on student affect without the resources needed to shift school culture and climate more broadly.

The research about equity practices in public schools demonstrates that schools promoting equity use innovative approaches that offer unique opportunities for learning (Darling-Hammond & Friedlander, 2008) and use project-based learning inspired by social justice and civic engagement (Skrla et al., 2004). Schools promoting equity are relentless in helping low-income families obtain a high-quality education that prepares students for postsecondary education with targets of 80% to 100% enrollment (Oakes et al., 2021). Such schools with a student body that is majority students of color who live in low-income communities find success with families by having a clear vision; an attractive theme for learning, such as environmental sciences and technology; and by using extensive recruitment and marketing strategies (Ayscue & Siegel-Hawley, 2019).

Leadership practices feature prominently in an inquiry on equity in schools. Leithwood's (2021) review of empirical studies and reviews of research on equitable school leadership identifies three prominent sets of practice that significantly improve equity in schools: fostering partnerships among schools, families, and communities aimed at ensuring student success; ensuring that curriculum guiding instruction in schools acknowledges and makes use of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic assets that students and families bring; and assisting teachers with the implementation of ambitious forms of instruction for traditionally underserved students. Redefining and transforming leadership is necessary for enacting equitable practices and sustainably achieving equitable outcomes, with attentiveness to the intentional promotion of leadership capacity and developing "caring and productive cultures" (Irby & Brown, 2004). Persisting in opportunities for continued reflection, coaching, intentional goal-setting, and connections of individual teacher beliefs to practice are also integral to leading and sustaining sets of equitable practices within schools, as King Lund et al. (2021) found in their examination of restorative justice practices within schools.

An examination of the existing research on equity considerations and practices in education in light of the development of Catholic theological insight articulated in the prior section of this article reveals a worthwhile opportunity to reconceptualize equity with the stated aims of Catholic education and the social justice mission of the Catholic Church in mind. Identifying the overlap of concepts between Catholic theology and contemporary articulations of equity enables educators and researchers to identify the presence of equitable policies and structures within schools as part and parcel of the quest for "authentic" Catholic education, meaning that the work of equity in Catholic schools ultimately can be understood as integral to the Catholic school's participation "in the saving mission of the Church" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 8). Conversely, applying equity as a framework for Catholic schools to surface areas of growth or vulnerability can then too be seen as an opportunity to recenter or realign the practice of a Catholic school to its social justice and evangelization aims. However, the complexities of equity in secular school settings and the conceptualization of human dignity, Christian anthropology, and Catholic social teaching as it relates to the work of Catholic schools demand the articulation of a distinct framework of equity in Catholic schools that encompasses the spectrum of equitable school practices and dispositions while embracing the values, virtues, and orientation of Catholic education.

Equity Dei Framework: Coalescing the Work of Equity and Catholic Education

Capitalizing on this opportunity to synthesize the defining characteristics of contemporary examinations of equity in education, we turn our efforts to presenting and articulating a framework that enables practitioners and researchers to interpret problems of practice within the Catholic school context through the lens of equity. To develop the framework, we reflect on the links between theological articulations about Christian anthropology, Catholic social teaching, and their insights on contemporary social issues. We also provide an overview of existing equity

research as a means of justifying the creation of such a framework to determine the essential elements of the framework. The resulting conceptual framework reflects our best efforts to define a trajectory for equity considerations in Catholic schools that enables rigorous inquiry and intentional practice and policy while stating the purpose and aims of such equity-focused work.

The framework has five central elements: (a) imago Dei; (b) cura personalis; (c) solidarity; (d) subsidiarity, or the principle that decisions should be at the lowest level possible and the highest level necessary; and (e) systems and structures, notably an examination of how institutionalized practices tie to individual and collectively held beliefs and facilitate particular outcomes for groups of individuals within the Catholic school ecosystem. These five central elements draw from the earlier discussion on the overlap between Christian anthropology, Catholic social teaching, and contemporary equity examinations in PK-12 education.

Figure 1

Graphic Representation of Authors' Proposed Equity Framework for Catholic Schools
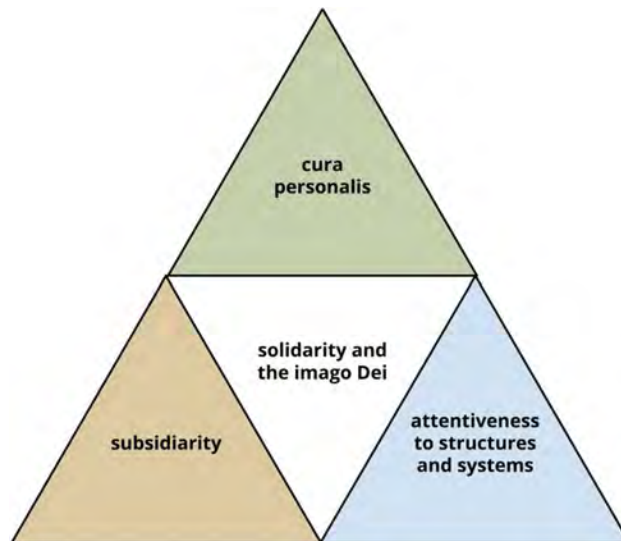
Additionally, two core beliefs can assist practitioners in translating the five central elements of the framework into operationalized practices while also centering the application of the framework on the flourishing of the ideal of the imago Dei. The first belief is that equity in schools exists when students are respected and celebrated for who they are, primarily when students identify as a member of an ethnic group (Gilead, 2020; Martin, 2014; Natividad, 2015). The first belief promoting equity connects with imago Dei because humans are to love God and each other as an expression of God. Fostering equity in Catholic schools creates an environment in which formal structures facilitate students feeling respected and celebrated for who they are. Each student has at

least one adult advocate who knows them well and who supports that student's educational experience. The evidence for imago Dei, solidarity, cura personalis, and equity is the celebration of each student for who they are, including their culture, stories, and lived experiences in the curriculum, during instruction, and throughout the school's identity. Educators are aware of Hispanic students' challenges, such as knowing the students whose families live in low-income communities, how many are learning English as a second language, and who will attend college as first-generation students.

The second belief is that equity is present in schools when demographic data does not predict student outcomes (Malarkey, 2006; Oakes et al., 2021). In other words, student learning is not predictable by race, socioeconomic status, gender, or other relevant factors and the evidence for equity in a school (Lopez et al., 2015). The connection with imago Dei occurs when each student has access to rigorous learning opportunities to prepare them for enrollment in post-secondary education to transform their socioeconomic background when reaching adulthood. The connection to solidarity and cura personalis is to actively work for the good of our students by building relationships with them by taking care of the whole person during the learning process.

Illustrative Examples: A Mosaic of Equity

To further illustrate the framework, we utilize an abbreviated mosaic narrative approach (drawing from Evans-Winters, 2019; Toliver, 2020) to ground the framework in transformational sites of practice in service to Hispanic students and students of color in Catholic schools. The mosaic consists of three partial narratives (Campano et al., 2016; Jovel & Lucas, 2015; Scanlan et al., 2019). drawing from research that centers equity, instructional practice, school culture, and student experience, either directly or indirectly informing the educational experiences of Hispanic students and students of color. The curated selections, together forming the mosaic that adds illustration to the framework, are aligned with and inform equitable school practices to demonstrate the importance of implementing these practices to cultivate equitable and transformative experiences in Catholic schools. They also provide explicit depictions of what implementation of the framework can look like in schools serving particular communities with many Hispanic students and students of color.

"Radical Hospitality" that Builds and Disrupts

The first piece of the mosaic is from Campano et al. (2016), who details a parish and school community in South Philadelphia embodying equity in its cross-cultural practices. The St. Thomas Aquinas Church and school served a diverse population of Hispanic, Chinese Indonesian, African-American, Vietnamese, European-American, and Filipino communities. By adopting a stance of "radical hospitality," community members actively built solidarity to support one another as a faith community while advocating for educational access and civic empowerment, primarily (but

not solely) through language and literacy practices that spanned home, community, church, and school. The radical hospitality approach to community-informed design thinking and participatory action research challenges inequitable practices that marginalized individuals and communities. By challenging normative beliefs and practices that viewed their identities, languages, and literacy practices as deficits, community members and students explored religious practices and texts, art, writing, and advocacy work to learn more about themselves and their development as complete individuals with inherent human dignity from an asset-based perspective. They actively disrupted patterns of inequity through their acts of solidarity and by centering their individual and collective dignity, knowing that their identities served as assets in further learning and advocacy work.

Engaging Students' Families and Cultures to Enhance Instruction

In Scanlan et al. (2019), Sarker, a mentor of the Two-Way Immersion Network for Catholic Schools (TWIN-CS, a program of the Roche Center for Catholic Education at Boston College), describes how a Catholic school serving Hispanic students centers families, cultures, and experiences to enhance instruction and learning. Instead of merely following a given curriculum and textbook instructional practices, a comprehensive instructional approach is presented, focusing on three elements: (a) building relationships, (b) fostering asset organizations, and (c) integrating funds of knowledge. These elements coalesced in implementing a Faith and Familia as Funds of Knowledge project between two TWIN-CS schools, where home-based literacy activities are used to link to and enhance classroom reading practices and literacy instruction. This project, along with foundational practices from the three elements, involved home visits, an unlearning of "deficit orientations towards linguistically minoritized, immigrant, or impoverished families and communities," and a recrafting of outdoor spaces for community use, offering spaces and services such as continuing education opportunities, wellness workshops, and legal clinics (Scanlan et al., 2019, pp. 122–123). These practices disrupted normative instructional practices to be responsive to Hispanic students, their families, and their communities while pushing for high expectations in language and literacy learning expectations through authentic, project-based learning activities. In addition to engagement and learning outcomes, students and families also took up practices that celebrated their faith and family traditions, including storytelling, cultural appreciation, and ongoing language development.

School Transformation Via Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

In the final mosaic selection, Jovel and Lucas (2015) describe the intentional transformation of the educational experience for African-American students at a Cristo Rey school in Los Angeles. Though the community focus in this article is not on Hispanic students, the attention to culturally responsive pedagogy, an essential equity practice for all students, including Hispanic students, is of particular importance.

Jovel and Lucas (2015) describe the school-wide approach to culturally responsive pedagogy as encompassing six characteristics (cited in Gay, 2000): (a) validating, (b) comprehensive, (c) multi-dimensional, (d) empowering, (e) transformative, and (f) emancipatory. These characteristics align with equitable practices and essential theological foundations as they are grounded in asset-based perspectives that value the students as comprehensive, whole individuals with inherent dignity and worth with tremendous strengths and gifts to learn and succeed. The characteristics of multi-dimensional and emancipatory in particular underline the necessity of disrupting normative instructional practices that may marginalize students of diverse identities and backgrounds, including Hispanic students. This pedagogy empowers students and teachers to question biases marginalizing them within their schools. As Jovel and Lucas (2015) note in their findings, "teachers were more than translators of cultural norms but were critical educators providing administrators opportunities to contend with their presumptions and stereotypes" (p. 213). Creating a culture where administrators and teachers attend to their biases is an essential equitable practice, yielding the transformative instructional learning environment and outcomes that all students deserve in Catholic schools.

Together, these mosaic selections demonstrate how the framework and its equitable practices are lived in the day-to-day lives of school leaders, teachers, and students. Though a mission statement and other written commitments may indicate intention, the material experience of students, namely Hispanic students for this article, are evidence of whether or not a commitment to equity exists in practice. Proper alignment between the framework and equitable practices ensures that theological foundations, research, and experience all inform the ultimate lived experience of students. While this mosaic is limited in its scope and depiction, it provides a glimpse into what can be in Catholic schools when a framework is adopted. Educators hold one another accountable to create a learning community and environment that centers equity from a theological perspective, and an equitable learning community and environment is characterized and animated by a set of equitable school practices.

Equitable School Practices

Beyond the considerations of Hispanic representation and equity in Catholic schools, the framework we posit has broad applicability towards a wide range of school practices. We unpack four sets of equitable school practices – holding each student to high standards; adjusting instruction so each student can learn; taking stock of their (educators') own identities, assumptions, and biases; and interrupting patterns of inequity – as a means of illustrating such broad applicability. All four practices align well with the concepts of solidarity and the *imago Dei* at the center of the framework, as these practices require schools to build relationships with students and work together to promote equity in the educational experience for every student.

Holding All Students to High Standards

The first equitable school practice is holding each student to high standards. Catholic schools are known to provide challenging curricular programs so that students attain high levels of academic performance (Bryk et al., 1993; Hoffer et al., 1985; Sander, 1997). Catholic social teachings require that Catholic school educators take responsibility for student learning for students to experience success. Students exhibit the characteristics of independent learners when they experience productive struggle while engaged with the content and tasks. Independent learners temporarily rely on the teacher to carry some of the cognitive load. Still, they utilize strategies and processes for completing a new task, attempting to complete new tasks without scaffolds, and getting unstuck in the learning process (Hammond, 2015). However, the educational experiences of students who identify as Hispanic may lead to becoming dependent learners who are unsure of how to learn new tasks, rely on the teacher to carry most of the cognitive load, are challenged with completing tasks without scaffolds, while sitting passively and waiting until the teacher assists, or do not retain information well (Hammond, 2015; Orosco, 2010). Teachers cultivate independent learning when each student believes intellectual abilities are developed qualities. There is a connection to the principle of subsidiarity because students should be engaged in a productive struggle with the content. To promote the principle of subsidiarity, teachers can use strategies like Gradual Release of Responsibility or project-based learning to create student-centered learning experiences that allow students to construct knowledge and learn critical thinking skills. Student-centered learning cultivates a growth mindset in students. Students with a growth mindset tend to show higher achievement across challenging school transitions and greater course completion rates in challenging math courses (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Academic press and strong social support are strategies that can hold each student to high standards. Learning improves in a supportive social environment when students experience academic press and strong social support (Lee et al., 1999). Schools that significantly impact student learning exhibit academic press, meaning that the content students learn is made clear and the expectations for academic learning are high. Students are held accountable for their performance and provided the assistance needed to achieve. Academic press refers to a school's emphasis on learning and academics and the drive of students and teachers to strive for academic achievement and excellence (Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy et al., 2006). Academic press shapes the normative and behavioral elements of a school (Goddard et al., 2000). Examining academic press and social support provides evidence for researchers and Catholic school educators to shift practice to address equity. Teachers report their school's focus on academic achievement to measure academic press. In contrast, students report whether their teachers challenge them to reach high levels of academic achievement, such as asking teachers in a survey whether their school sets high standards for academic performance, organizes the school day to maximize instructional time, and focuses on what is best for student learning when making important decisions.

Social support strengthens social relationships among students and adults in and out of school. Its logic suggests that students will learn more in settings where they are well-known and cared for, and when their social and emotional development is supported. These relationships imbue a sense of trust, confidence, and psychological safety that allows students to take risks, admit errors, ask for help, and experience failure along the way to higher levels of learning (Lee et al., 1999). According to Mason et al. (2020), the factors essential to meet students' social-emotional needs and to foster academic success are consciousness, compassion, confidence, courage, and community found in Catholic schools. Consciousness refers to an awareness of others and ourselves, understanding what we are feeling and what is happening in the environment. There is a connection with cura personalis when students' socio-emotional needs are met to foster academic success. When Catholic school educators provide opportunities for students to learn about themselves, their perceptions, and their emotions, student consciousness grows. Regarding compassion, teachers increase individual compassion for self and others by embedding compassion as a primary value in classrooms. Modeling compassion and helping students reframe situations increases the understanding of trauma and creates knowledge of how to reduce stress and increase kindness and caring. Confidence propels the transformation necessary to remediate trauma and build self-esteem. Without confidence, students are challenged with developing proficiency in academic skills. Without emotional confidence, students may fail to act in ways that support a compassionate community. Courage is needed to develop compassionate responses to their experiences, as well as to speak out, further grow, and make decisions that do not directly support their self-interests. Schools are positioned to nurture courageous mindsets. Compassionate action arises when individuals recognize their compassion and have the confidence and courage to act compassionately. To measure social support, teachers ask students about the frequency with which their teachers: relate the subject to their interests, listen to what they say, know them very well, and believe they can do well in school (Lee et al., 1999).

Adjusting Instruction for Students

The second equitable school practice is adjusting instruction so each student can learn. Catholic schools provide ongoing opportunities to build assessment literacy by understanding the skills assessments measure and the principles of responsible data usage, as well as interpreting data reports (Boudett et al., 2020). Multiple assessments are used to understand student learning to make adjustments to instruction. When analyzing results from assessments, questions are posed and answered, such as: "Whose stories are being told in these results?" and "Whose stories are not being told in these results?" Adjusting instruction for students differs greatly from commonly used pedagogies in which teachers ask students low-order thinking questions which require the recall of knowledge and comprehension, give directions, monitor seatwork, review assignments, administer assessments, and manage student classroom conduct by punishing noncompliance. This

previous teaching strategy emphasizing lecture and rote memorization is often known as a "peda-gogy of poverty" because it causes students to graduate with limited skills and shallow knowledge (Haberman, 1991). Adjusting instruction for students promotes equity in schools by asking ques-tions through an equity lens, such as: Whose stories are told in the data we are examining? Whose stories are not told in the data we are examining? What inferences do we make when examining student work? What patterns do we notice in our interactions with students? How well do our action plans support each student to thrive? How do we involve student voices in how we assess our action plans?

Examination of Identities, Assumptions, and Biases

The third equitable school practice is that educators examine the multiple identities, assump-tions, and biases they hold. Promoting equity in Catholic schools means that educators must examine their own cultural identities. Culture shapes actions in ways that are invisible and nor-mal. Learning about one's culture is more challenging than learning about the culture of others (Hammond, 2015). It is easier to "look out the window" at others than to "look in the mirror" for self-examination. Educators understand their individual biases as well as the triggers for those biases. This ongoing self-development occurs by understanding their background and experiences, as well as the backgrounds and experiences of students (Hammond, 2015). When embracing students' ethnic cultures, schools do so on three levels: surface, shallow, or deep. Surface-level culture consists of visual and concrete elements of culture, such as food, trust, music, and holidays. This level of culture has a low emotional charge so that changes do not create great anxiety in a person or group. Shallow-level culture consists of unspoken rules around everyday social interac-tions and norms, such as courtesy, attitudes toward elders, nature of friendship, concepts of time, personal space between people, nonverbal communication, rules about contact, or appropriate touching. Cultural values are placed into action at this level, and there is a strong emotional charge. Individuals interpret certain behaviors as disrespectful, offensive, or hostile at this level. Social violation of norms at this level can cause mistrust, distress, or social friction. Deep-level culture consists of tacit knowledge and unconscious assumptions that govern worldviews. It also contains the cosmology that guides ethics, spirituality, health, and theories of group harmony. Deep culture governs how we learn new information. Elements at this level have an intense emotional charge. Challenges to cultural values at this level produce culture shock or trigger the brain's fight or flight response (Hammond, 2015). There is a connection with systems and structures for schools to foster the conditions to embrace students' cultures deeply. The lack of systems and structures may foster surface-level and shallow-level school cultures.

When educators take stock of their own identities, assumptions, and biases, there is an aware-ness that assumptions are made about students' academic performance in the classroom, so ques-tions are asked and answered to challenge these assumptions, such as "What assumptions do we

make about students when we look at their work?" and "What patterns do we see in how educators interact with different students?" We can learn about students' experiences using high-quality surveys and focus groups around student belonging and connection. We can investigate and measure student agency by asking: "What helps a child develop a sense of purpose and efficacy? and "What can the school do to cultivate that sense of purpose and efficacy?" According to Safir and Dugan (2021), promoting equity in schools begins with asking and answering: What is an equity challenge we need to address right now? Why does this challenge matter? Who is most impacted by this challenge? There is a connection with cura personalis because understanding ourselves and our students is an examination of the whole person.

The evidence for educators exploring and understanding how their particular background and experiences shape teaching and their relationships with students is participation in ongoing professional learning about one's implicit biases and identities. Further evidence includes reflections about the teacher's thinking after instruction or the many decisions made in planning and implementing a lesson. By considering these elements in light of their impact on student learning, teachers can determine where to focus their efforts in making revisions and choose which aspects of the instruction they will continue in future lessons. Teachers may reflect on their practice through collegial conversations, journal writing, examining student work, conversations with students, or simply thinking about their teaching.

Active Interruption of Patterns of Inequity

The fourth equitable practice promoting equity is for educators to interrupt patterns of inequity actively. The interruption of patterns of inequity is consistent with the Church's commitment to promoting social justice as evidenced by the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus:

> the path we seek to follow with the poor promotes social justice and the change of economic, political, and social structures that generate injustice; this path is a necessary dimension of the reconciliation of individuals, peoples, and their cultures with one another, with nature, and with God (Sosa, 2019, para. 3).

Taking an inquiry stance via an equity lens means asking questions about the assets to build upon and the deficits to target. This practice actively interrupts inequity patterns in Catholic schools. Using this practice, with a root cause analysis protocol, is useful when creating plans for school improvement action and plans to assess the progress that interrupts patterns of inequity.

Another strategy to interrupt inequity patterns is acknowledging educators' power in schools. There are issues of power enacted in classrooms and schools, with the power of teachers and staff

over students and families, the power of the content in the curriculum, and the power of the school in the educational placement process. The rules of the culture of power reflect the rules of those who have power. The implication is that students who identify as Hispanic are to acquire the culture of those in power to experience success in schools (Delpit, 2012). Those with power are frequently least aware or least willing to acknowledge its existence. The acknowledgment of both being the beneficiary of power and participating in the culture of power is courageous. Students and families who identify as Hispanic experience less power and are more likely to recognize the power variable most acutely. The counterbalance in the power differential is solidarity, which emphasizes cohesion and collaboration among all people regardless of national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences and requires that people seek peace by working for justice (USCCB, n.d.).

Discussion

What are the equity challenges Catholic schools need to address right now? Why do these challenges matter? Who is most impacted by these challenges? In this article, we argue that to understand challenges when promoting equity, using a theologically-driven framework helps Catholic school practitioners and researchers identify the assets and deficits in promoting equity and using equitable school practices. To that end, we have put forth a framework for understanding equity in Catholic schools and using equitable practices to deliver an equitable learning environment. We draw on research and theory to connect Catholic theological spirituality to equity and equitable school practices, particularly with applied examples impacting Hispanic representation in Catholic schools through an illustrative mosaic.

There are few studies about equitable school practices in Catholic schools. Future research using the Equity Dei framework should examine the two strands of equity in schools, school practices, and the five elements of Catholic theology. The research gap about how Catholic schools respect and celebrate students for who they are is an opportunity to collect narrative stories as data sources from students and families about how the school respects and celebrates the multiple identities held by students. While Greeley and Coleman's (1985) research identified that Catholic school students outperform public school students, it is not known if and how Catholic school student outcomes may or may not be predictable by demographic data in schools with a student body with mixed or low socioeconomic levels. Researchers may examine the academic opportunities provided to students and compare rigorous learning within and across schools with matching demographics in a diocese. It is also unknown which practices, such as response to intervention or multi-tiered systems of support, Catholic school educators use to adjust instruction and the impact these practices have on teaching and learning. Finally, more can be known about Catholic schools' practices for educators to take stock of their own identities, assumptions, and biases and how this

knowledge of self impacts relationships with students or promotes a deep level of culture in school. Research on problems of practice that show patterns of inequity, such as patterns in how educators interact with different students, the extent of involving students in assessing teaching and learning, or how school improvement plans address the needs of each student, would advance this work and continue to work toward broader equity practices in Catholic schools.

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