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## Utilizing Comparative Education as a Platform for Deepening Student Engagement with Catholic Social Teaching: An Exploratory Case Study in Study-Aboard

### Cover Page Footnote

Much gratitude is due to the participating students who generously shared their time and insights with me for this article. Additional gratitude is due to the class as a whole and to the school sites that hosted us in Tokyo. Finally, much gratitude to my co-instructor who has been and remains an outstanding colleague.

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## Utilizing Comparative Education as a Platform for Deepening Student Engagement with Catholic Social Teaching: An Exploratory Case Study in Study-Abroad


Bryan Meadows, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Central to the mission of Catholic higher education are the themes of Catholic social teaching. This contribution to the Education in Practice section recounts a 15-week undergraduate course that deepened student engagement in Catholic social teaching themes through comparative education studies and a study abroad experience to Japan. A detailed description of the course's main segments draws on artifacts of student coursework and post-interviews. The contribution of comparative education is that students are provided a platform upon which they can explore deeper, underlying principles to individual Catholic social teaching themes. This contribution further provides practitioners step-by-step guidance in how to develop similar learning experiences for students in their university context. This report of Catholic Education at the classroom-level fits into the existing knowledge of how universities in the United States are engaging undergraduates in Catholic social teaching themes, as an expression of Catholic mission.

**Keywords:** Catholic higher education, Catholic social teaching, comparative education, study abroad

Catholic social teaching (CST) is inherent to the mission of Catholic universities, as set forth in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae/From the Heart of the Church* (The Holy See, 1990). Brigham and Soltis (2018) assert that CST “should be observed in the way institutions educate and form students, promote faculty research, and express their corporate and institutional identity”

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(p. 90). In their (1995) statement, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) organizes CST into seven distinct themes: Life and Dignity of the Human Person; Call to Family, Community, and Participation; Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; Rights and Responsibilities; Solidarity; Care for God's Creation; and Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1995). The seven themes are derived from a written tradition that includes "multiple sources within the Catholic faith, including Scripture, papal encyclicals, episcopal statements, and the writings of theologians" (Nash et al., 2011, p. 489). Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Rerum Novarum: The Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor* (The Holy See, 1891) is conventionally understood as the foundational document. At the center of the USCCB framework is the theme of Life and Dignity of the Human Person. As Estrada (2011) explains, CST is "grounded in the principle of human dignity, the idea that all life and people are sacred and [that] ... people are always valued over things" (p. 443). And, it is through the foundational principle of human dignity that all other CST themes are realized (e.g., Shank, 2007).

Comparative education studies—coupled with a study abroad experience—provides a unique environment in which to explore CST themes with undergraduates attending a Catholic university. This report recounts a 15-week undergraduate course that deepened student engagement in CST themes through comparative education studies and a study abroad experience. It further provides practitioner guidance in developing similar opportunities for students in their university teaching context. This report on Catholic Education in Practice adds to the existing knowledge of how CST themes are realized in university classroom instruction. In addition, it encourages current university educators to think about how they could leverage interdisciplinarity and experiential learning in their own settings to deepen student engagement in CST themes.

### Course Design

At Seton Hall University, all undergraduates complete a three-course sequence known as the University Core. According to the program website, the University Core's "three signature courses are central to the Catholic tradition of the University, although they are in no way exclusive to this tradition" (Seton Hall University, 2020). Academic departments have the option of developing discipline-specific courses for the University Core which engage students in the Catholic intellectual tradition through a unique lens. Comparative Education Studies through Study Abroad is one such course created by the university's College of Education. Comparative education studies was selected as the discipline-specific content, and CST was selected as the Catholic intellectual tradition component. The coupling of the two capitalized on the intuitive connection between formal schooling and CST themes.

The semester course featured three main components: (a) introduction to comparative education (with Japan as a case study); (b) Catholic social teaching themes; and (c) a study abroad

portion to Tokyo. Eleven undergraduate students enrolled in the class, representing a range of subject majors. The class met during the semester in bi-weekly sessions on the university campus; it culminated in a two-week study abroad experience to Tokyo, where students visited primary, secondary, and postsecondary schools. The assigned course readings and major assignments are detailed below in Tables 1 and 2.

Distinct from reports of previous studies Bamber (2011); Estrada (2011); Gonzalez and Balderas (2016), the purpose of the travel for this course was not service learning but firsthand observation of Japanese schooling practices. This was a chance for students to participate in cross-cultural exchange in order to think deeply about education and to make links to CST themes. Additionally, the purpose of the course was not necessarily student faith formation (e.g., DeVinne (2015); Jessup-Anger et al. (2016)), but to offer students opportunities to engage with CST themes in ways consistent with their own personal faith journeys.

**Table 1***Course Readings*

Course component	Assigned reading(s)
Introduction to Comparative Education: Japan as case study	Hood (2015). <i>Japan: The basics</i> . Routledge. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2008). School system overview. <a href="http://www.mext.go.jp/en/policy/education/overview/index.htm">http://www.mext.go.jp/en/policy/education/overview/index.htm</a> Center on International Educational Benchmarking (2017). <i>Japan education report</i> . <a href="http://ncee.org/what-we-do/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/japan-overview/">http://ncee.org/what-we-do/center-on-international-education-benchmarking/top-performing-countries/japan-overview/</a> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2017). Viewing the Japanese school system through the prism of PISA. <a href="https://www.oecd.org/japan/46623994.pdf">https://www.oecd.org/japan/46623994.pdf</a>
Catholic Social Teaching themes	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1995). <i>Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and directions</i> . <a href="http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/sharing-catholic-social-teaching-challenges-and-directions.cfm">http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/sharing-catholic-social-teaching-challenges-and-directions.cfm</a> Singer-Towns (2012). <i>Catholic Social Teaching: Christian life in society</i> . Saint Mary's Press. McKenna (2013). <i>A concise guide to Catholic Social Teaching</i> . Ave Maria Press.

### Research Question and Data Collection

The following research question guided this project: What contribution to university student engagement in CST themes can be found when students explore CST through a combined lens of comparative education and study abroad? Since this research approach was intended to benefit pedagogical practice in a naturalistic (i.e., uncontrolled) classroom setting, this study qualifies as an example of action research (Efron & Ravid, 2019).

**Table 2***Course Assignments*

Timing of assignment(s)	Details of assignment(s)
Before travel to Japan	<p><b>In-class poster discussion task:</b> Students form into three groups and then cycle through discussion tables set up around the classroom. Placed on each table is a blank poster paper with markers. At each station, students relate CST themes to formal schooling in the United States and Japan. They document their discussion points on the poster paper before progressing to the next. (The student products are included below as Appendix A.)</p> <p><b>Reflective paper on Catholic social teaching:</b> Students compose a brief academic paper of at least 900 words where they reflect on their personal experiences in U.S. formal schooling (K–12 or postsecondary) and make connections to two themes of Catholic social teaching. Specifically, students respond to the three prompts listed here.</p> <p>(a) What two themes of Catholic social teaching do you feel are most relevant or the most closely connected to formal schooling practices? Justify your selections using informal references (no APA) to assigned course readings.</p> <p>(b) Provide at least one example each of how formal schooling in the United States realizes the two themes you selected. For example, you might think of the level of school policy, the level of classroom practices, and/or the level of individual student/teacher.</p> <p>(c) Finally, evaluate how well formal schooling in the United States realizes the ideals of the two themes you selected. What could formal schooling do differently in order to better achieve the ideals?</p>
During travel to Japan	<p><b>Social media check-in posts:</b> During the travel portion on at least six separate days, students post an observation/realization about one of the following topics: Japanese formal schooling, U.S. formal schooling, Catholic social teaching, or global competence. Students and instructor post using an agreed-upon social media platform such as Twitter.</p>
Following travel to Japan	<p><b>Final report paper:</b> Upon completion of the travel portion and return to the United States, students compose a final report paper of at least 1500 words in length in which they address three questions.</p> <p>(a) What is at least one thing about formal schooling in the case study country that you would like to see implemented in the United States? Explain why using specific examples from personal observation. (450w minimum)</p> <p>(b) What experience(s) in the case study country do you feel helped you to expand your intercultural competence? Describe using specific examples from personal observation. (450w minimum)</p> <p>(c) Where do you recognize examples of Catholic social teaching themes in the formal schooling practices in the case study country? Describe using specific examples from personal observation. (450w minimum)</p>

Data collection followed the conclusion of the course and submission of final grades. Seven of the 11 students in the class consented to meet with the author for post-interviews. The seven students gave written permission for the author to include excerpts of their coursework and interview statements in this report; pseudonyms are used to protect student identity. The participating students also completed a member check of a previous draft of this report. Table 3 provides relevant information about each of the seven participating students.

**Table 3***Featured Students*

Student pseudonym	College major	CST knowledge before course?	Date of interview
Patrick	College of Education and Human Services	No	June 17
Andrew	College of Arts and Sciences	No	June 21
Julie	College of Education and Human Services	No	June 21
Susan	College of Arts and Sciences	No	June 21
Ann	College of Arts and Sciences	No	July 24
Jonathan	College of Business	No	July 25
Jessica	College of Arts and Sciences	Yes	August 1

### **Review of Course Segments**

This section details the course segments pertaining to CST: (a) student knowledge of CST at the onset of the course; (b) pre-travel class groupwork and academic papers; (c) CST themes during study abroad; and (d) post-travel student papers. Discussions of each segment will draw on student coursework and post-interviews, with brief references to the relevant literature.

#### **Student Familiarity with Catholic Social Teaching at Course Onset**

At the onset of the course, students were assigned introductory readings on CST themes: (a) the USCCB (1995) source text, and (b) interpretive chapters from textbooks (McKenna, 2013; Singer-Towns, 2012). Following the assigned readings, the focus of in-class discussion was cultivating student interpretation of the CST themes through the individual faith-based lens they brought to the classroom. This inclusive stance on the part of the co-instructors was aimed at capitalizing on the universal potential of CST themes (Brendan & Shank, 2012; Heft, 2006; Nash et al., 2011). As Brigham & Soltis (2018) note, “Catholic social teaching is fundamentally inclusive both in its vision (concerned with human dignity and the common good) and in its appeal (with modern CST being addressed to all men and women of good will)” (p. 105). The inclusive character of CST works

to the benefit of Catholic higher education which welcomes students of all faith traditions (Doyle & Connelly, 2011; Haen, 2013). For example, Jessup-Anger et al. (2016) underscore the value of interfaith dialogue on CST themes; following their study of student faith development in a Catholic university setting, the authors concluded that “students’ differing faith traditions on campus may enrich Catholic students’ search for meaning by providing opportunities for dissonance between the religion with which they were raised and the religions they encounter” (p. 535).

In the post-interview, six of the seven participating students reported that CST was new to them when they received the assigned readings at the onset of the course. One student, Susan, said that she had heard people make reference to Catholic theology - as in “Catholic teaching says ...,” - but she never completely understood where these references were coming from (Interview, Jun 21). The explicit attention to CST themes in the readings helped her finally make the connection. In contrast, another student (Jessica) reported that she entered the class with a firm understanding of CST themes because she had studied these formally while attending Catholic high school (Interview, Aug 1).

### **Pre-Travel Groupwork and Academic Papers Connecting CST Themes to Formal Schooling**

Prior to travel, students completed groupwork in class and academic papers. This pre-travel work provided students with opportunities to: (a) relate CST themes to the field of education according to their personal experiences in the United States, and (b) practice with comparative analysis in applying the CST themes to their growing knowledge of formal schooling in Japan.

The in-class discussion took the following structure (see Table 2). Students were formed into three groups: *Aquinas*, *Boland*, and *Corrigan*. Each group cycled around the discussion stations, which were set up at tables in the classroom. At each station, students related the CST themes to formal schooling in the United States and Japan, documenting their discussion points via posters before progressing to the next table. (See Appendix A to view the posters students completed during this activity.)

There were two underlying objectives to the in-class discussion task. One was to underscore the close relationship between educational practices and CST themes (Collopy et al., 2012; Gonzalez & Balderas, 2016). Second, in seeking relationships between the two schooling systems with CST, the task led them to recognize the universal potential of the CST themes (Brendan & Shank, 2012; Heft, 2006; Nash et al., 2011), in that they may be used to interpret morality and social justice (Bergman, 2011; Dorr, 2012; Eifler et al., 2008; Heft, 2006) in diverse institutional settings—including that of education.

The theme that all three groups related to U.S. education was *Call to Family, Community, and Participation*. They saw this in parent–teacher involvement and in how schools socialize students,



preparing them for adulthood. The theme of *Rights and Responsibilities* was also named by two (2) of the groups. For this theme, the students noted the responsibilities placed on students in U.S. formal schooling but also their rights to choose their own classes. Other themes the groups invoked were life and the dignity of the human being (1), dignity of work and the rights of workers (1), and care for God's creation (1).

Next was a comparative education analysis task. Students tapped into their emerging knowledge of Japanese formal schooling (covered in a previous class session) to identify examples of how schools in Japan realize these same CST themes. As they selected examples from the Japanese context and explained their reasoning, they were indirectly providing a summary of how they understand each CST theme.

For our purposes, *comparative education studies* is defined as the empirical analysis of formal schooling institutions between two or more nation-states (e.g., Bray and Kai (2007). In our case, formal schooling in the United States and Japan was the object of analysis. Classroom discussion and activities defined *formal schooling* as institutions (public and private) licensed by national polities to provide educational services. The analysis we embarked on was multi-leveled, from the level of national/federal policy, to the level of the school building, and finally to the level of the individual classroom.

Comparative education studies provides a platform upon which students can explore CST because of the intuitive link with institutions of formal schooling (Collopy et al., 2012; Gonzalez & Balderas, 2016). For example, part of the central concept of Human Dignity concerns participation in society with equitable access to educational opportunities (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1995). The concepts of Rights and Responsibilities entail access to full participation in society, including institutions of formal schooling (see also Gonzalez & Balderas, 2016). In addition, education scholars reference CST themes in their treatments of critical pedagogy and social justice (Bamber, 2011; Collopy et al., 2012; Eick and Ryan, 2014; Valadez & Mirci, 2015). Scholars in Catholic universities have further capitalized on this link in teacher preparation programs (Collopy et al., 2012; Eick & Ryan, 2014; Gonzalez & Balderas, 2016).

In their station discussions, the three student groups collectively observed that primary and secondary students in Japan help clean the school grounds on a daily basis. What is interesting is that two groups (Aquinas and Boland) interpreted the cleaning routine according to the CST theme of Rights and Responsibilities, while the Corrigan group related it to Care for God's Creation. As one would expect, the students were less prolific in the specific connections they drew between CST themes and formal schooling in Japan. Nevertheless, applying these themes both to their personal experiences in the United States and to their secondhand learning about schooling in Japan was a valuable learning activity, as it drew them into higher orders of thinking about the themes.

Jessica, who self-identifies as Catholic, recounted that the in-class discussion was memorable because of the opportunity to discuss CST themes with students of different (or non-) faith traditions (Interview, Aug 1). The conversation changed her perspective on CST themes because her peers presented respectful critiques of them. But, she explained, they also expressed value in the CST themes, noting for example how some themes are consistent with the beneficial aspects of their own faith traditions. Jessica's comments recall Jessup-Anger et al.'s (2016) assertion that interfaith dialogue is beneficial to students in Catholic university settings.

Following the readings and in-class discussion, students each composed an academic paper where they selected CST themes to relate to formal schooling in the United States. In their reflective pieces, the most frequently cited theme was rights and responsibilities (4). Next were the themes of call to family, community, and participation (2); life and the dignity of the human person (2); and care for God's creation (2). Also noted were the themes of dignity of work and the rights of workers (1) and solidarity (1). Students raised their positive experiences with the U.S. school system. For example, speaking about his recent experiences at the college level, Andrew made a connection to the dignity of work and the rights of workers:

Every profession has its value no matter how it is viewed in society. We are taught to not bias ourselves based on what someone's major is and this, in my opinion, is a great thing because it teaches us that everyone is equal and deserves respect that they are working hard for their future. (Pre-travel paper, Apr 2)

Some noted district-wide policies, such as school anti-bullying campaigns. Julie wrote, "Schools defend the value of the person and dignity ... A clear example are the policies schools implement to eradicate bullying among students" (Pre-travel paper, Apr 1). Finally, Jonathan linked student access to education with the theme of rights and responsibilities:

One of the rights every child is given that helps form a dignified life is the right to attend public schooling ... By denying people the right to learn, you are cutting off an essential part of human growth and that is why it is considered a God-given right under the themes of Catholic social teaching. (Pre-travel paper, Apr 2)

The closing task of the paper assignment took students again into higher-order thinking about CST themes. Using their personal experiences as a source, students evaluated U.S. formal schooling for how well schools are meeting CST themes. Thinking about his selected theme of solidarity, Patrick recommended more groupwork and guided discussions in U.S. classrooms:

By working together in groups and having more genuine discussions on various topics, teachers can allow students to come together ... and value each other's differences and truly work to form solidarity as a class. (Pre-travel paper, Apr 4)

Speaking to Rights and Responsibilities, Jonathan recommended that U.S. schools do more to connect students with their counterparts in other countries because “[it] could go a long way in students appreciating what they have and in turn work harder” (Pre-travel paper, Apr 2). Jessica expressed concern for a U.S. schooling system “taking actions to prevent teaching about climate change which may [have] an effect on Care for God’s Creation” (Pre-travel paper, Apr 2).

### **CST Themes during Study Abroad**

During the two-week study abroad portion, students made observations of Japanese schooling practices during site visits and related them to CST themes. The existing Catholic education literature recounts how faculty have successfully engaged students in CST themes through the platform of international study abroad experiences (Bamber, 2011; Gonzalez & Balderas, 2016; Haber & Getz, 2011). For example, Gonzalez & Balderas (2016) conclude—following an international experience for education majors—that the “majority of students noted transformative types of changes and epiphanies” in how they perceived the field of education in the United States (p. 365).

In the post-travel interview, students noted the strong impact of personally experiencing Japan versus reading or watching videos about it. For example, Andrew said that the “trip was necessary to fully understand the themes we discussed in class” (Interview, Jun 21). Students were able to relate CST themes to their firsthand experiences during the Tokyo school visits. One theme was Rights and Responsibilities. Julie and Ann both remarked that formal schooling in Japan affords students important responsibilities from an early age. Ann also pointed out that there can be a negative impact on some students when they feel too much pressure. A second identified theme was Life and Dignity of the Human Person. For example, Julie noted that the children in the Tokyo schools were vibrant and lively, embracing the responsibilities placed upon them. She concluded that “[r]esponsibility also gives you dignity” (Interview, Jun 21). For Jessica, she learned that the platform gates in subway stations are partially to prevent suicides; in her interview, she linked this to care for God’s creation—and quickly added life and the dignity of the human person (Interview, Aug 1).

### **Post-Travel Student Papers**

In their final papers, students related CST themes to their personal observations of Japanese formal schooling. Again, students were drawn to certain CST themes. The most frequently cited were the themes of call to family, community, and participation (4) and rights and responsibilities (4). Next was solidarity (2) and care for God’s creation (2). In relating their observations to the theme of call to family, community, and participation, Ann and Jessica both pointed to the communal lunch routine in Japanese schools known as *kyushoku*. Ann recalled her observations during the middle school visit:

During this lunchtime, students were handing out lunches to fellow students in their homeroom and all of them waited until there was a lunch in front of every child ... In the Japanese classroom, I felt a sense of community, which was not something I felt as a student in America. (Post-travel paper, Jun 4)

In her paper, Jessica observed that all students in the classroom participate directly in *kyushoku*, with each serving a particular role. It is in this shared contribution to the larger common good that Jessica perceived call to family, community, and participation. Students also wrote about the theme of rights and responsibilities. Julie, for example, remarked on how all students in the Japanese schooling system receive equal amounts of resources so that they can be successful:

In the case of Japan, rich and poor students receive equal educational opportunities ... The Japanese believe that disadvantages are a collective responsibility. Students' disadvantages are handled by the national and prefecture governments, and teachers aiming to benefit the students. (Post-travel paper, Jun 5)

Another theme that students wrote about was solidarity. Patrick wrote that he observed students in classrooms who shared a cultural identity. He elaborated: "It felt as if every student had a genuine liking for one another ... like students were each other's keeper" (Post-travel paper, Jun 5). Susan also detected the theme of solidarity, writing that on the one hand, a shared cultural identity is good for community building, but it also leads to the social marginalization of those deemed to be outsiders.

## Discussion

As detailed above, the design of the course guided students through deepening levels of engagement with CST themes. Students first built a general understanding of CST themes through source readings. Having established such declarative knowledge, they extended their understanding in a comparative analysis discussion and write-up, relating CST themes first to the U.S. educational system and then to that of Japan. Next, students deepened their personal understanding of CST themes in their firsthand visits to Japanese schools during study abroad (i.e., experiential learning). Finally, the students synthesized their learning in the form of a reflective paper. As designed, students participated in an increasingly complex and personal involvement with CST themes—something very different from more familiar teaching approaches centered around a quiz of student declarative knowledge.

Comparative education was specifically chosen as an interpretive lens because of the intuitive link shared between CST themes and formal institutions of schooling (Collopy et al., 2012; Gonzalez & Balderas, 2016). In the pre-travel classroom activities, the students invoked six of the seven themes defined by the USCCB (1995). This indicates that students were able to perceive the close link between CST and formal schooling practices in the United States.

Students further demonstrated their deepening understanding of CST themes by relating five of the seven CST themes to Japanese schooling, a context which up to that point was new to students. One will recall that during groupwork in class, students connected what they knew about Japanese formal schooling to the CST themes of rights and responsibilities and care for God's creation. The connections they made suggest that they were understanding these themes at a deeper, conceptual level than they would have if attempting to apply them to unfamiliar contexts.

Comparative education functioned as a backdrop against which students engaged in the deeper meanings of the CST themes beyond surface-level actualizations (see Table 1). Furthermore, the diversity of the class make-up (e.g., multiple religious faiths) and the international comparative lens (Japan and the United States) further set the stage for students to realize the universal potential of the themes. As noted earlier, one student (Jessica) found the in-class discussion to be valuable in that she gained new insights into CST themes through the perspectives of those classmates who did not identify as Catholic (Interview, Aug 1). The value of comparative education studies is also seen in how the quality of the student connections to CST themes gained in substance between the pre-travel discussion and the post-travel paper. For example, in their post-travel papers, students linked Call to Family to the communal lunch routines they observed and the way they saw elementary students showing concern for one another. These tangible links were made possible because of the study abroad component of the class.

### **Recommendations for Educators**

It is the responsibility of Catholic universities to impart knowledge of CST themes and their sources, following the Catholic intellectual tradition. This action research project has demonstrated how students can be guided beyond surface-level understandings of CST themes. In this case, comparative education and study abroad were utilized to deepen student engagement in the CST themes through higher-order cognitive tasks, such as compare–contrast, interpretation, evaluation, and synthesis.

Comparative education studies is a useful interdisciplinary companion to CST themes by way of the intended universality of the CST themes (Brendan & Shank, 2012; Heft, 2006; Nash et al., 2011). That is, the teacher may introduce students to CST themes in one setting and then prompt the students themselves to see the same themes in new, less familiar settings. The comparison that they make not only reveals a student's current understanding of the theme, but further underscores the universal CST element that is observable between the new and unfamiliar contexts.

The unique contribution of study abroad is discernable in the student reports, for example in the students' reactions to their firsthand experiences with *kyushoku*—the school lunch routine in Japan. Ann recalled how she “felt a sense of community,” and noted that she had not felt this as a student in America (Post-travel paper, Jun 4). These kinds of student reactions perfectly exemplify

the experiential learning that comes with study abroad. Such a student learning experience would be difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish in a conventional classroom setting.

In this final section, a step-by-step guide is offered for university instructors interested in integrating comparative analysis and/or international travel with the study of CST themes. The recommendations draw from the student artifacts reviewed above, student suggestions in the post-interviews, and the reflective work of the co-instructors.

1) Engage students in the CST themes as presented in authoritative texts of the Catholic Church. Many university instructors, while feeling inspired by CST themes, may not feel entirely confident to lecture comprehensively on the CST themes. Show humility and embrace this position as a fellow learner with your students. One idea at this stage is to invite an authoritative guest speaker to meet with the class as a follow-up to any assigned student readings.

2) Establish classroom spaces where students can process CST themes in open-ended and non-judgmental ways. That is, encourage students to interpret the themes in ways that make sense for them and their faith journey. For Patrick, the classroom discussions and activities were especially “useful in gaining an understanding of Catholic social teaching” (Interview, Jun 17). An open-ended stance is especially beneficial to classrooms diverse in faith traditions, as is the case in many Catholic universities. In these early conversations, the instructor will need to offer up multiple real-life examples of CST themes from their personal perspective. Ask students for their take on the examples.

3) It is important in these early discussions to invite students into a personal exploration of CST themes in dialogue with selected readings and with their peers, in order to discover the underlying principles of CST themes. This conceptual foundation is essential for subsequent comparative work and even international travel because the way CST themes are realized in new contexts is presumably very different. However, if the students are primed to look for the basic principles of CST themes, rather than get lost in surface details, they will be in a better position to discern their presence in unfamiliar contexts.

4) Challenge students to identify real-life examples in their familiar surroundings that convey the CST themes for them, whether they are a family member, a news item, or a current or past celebrity. They can share these with their classmates in person or using digital apps. The benefit of this student task is that they indirectly communicate their depth of understanding of the themes in the examples they select and the reasons behind their selection. This is something that Ann and Jessica both explicitly recommended in their post-interviews. In Ann’s words, the idea would be to take close notice of how CST themes play out in the U.S. context, and thus “help students be mindful of themes” (Interview, Jul 24).

5) Comparative analysis is a valuable next step because it leads students into deeper conceptual

explorations of the basic principles of each CST theme. In the comparative task, students relate CST themes to an unfamiliar context. This stands in contrast to the previous task of identifying CST themes in terrain familiar to the students. In this semester-long course, we selected formal institutions of education, since it is something present in most nation-states and there is easy-to-find information online from government and non-governmental organization websites. Additionally, there are active lines of research into the anthropology of education and into comparative education studies. These areas yield many useful academic sources for comparative study. However, comparative study may be developed around a range of subjects, including economic design/labor laws; pathways to citizenship; policies/practices related to climate change; and health care access.

6) Lastly, we were fortunate enough to organize and carry out a study abroad trip to Japan, giving students firsthand experiences in the schooling system we had been discussing for months from our campus classroom. Our international exchange depends on interpersonal relationships between colleagues as well as the generosity of our hosts in Japan who welcome us into their schools for single-day visits. During these visits, students make written observations of what they are experiencing and later relate those observations back to CST themes. In his post-interview, Patrick suggested that each student focus on one CST theme throughout the trip because it was too much to try to think of all seven consistently during this time (Interview, Jun 17).

Very little can substitute for firsthand visits to new places abroad. When international travel is not permissible, a near-substitute is social media apps. These allow groups of students to meet in dialogue either in real-time (e.g., conferencing apps) or in written correspondence (e.g., email, texting, shared documents). For example, in our case of comparative education, if overseas travel is not permitted, our back-up plan is to exchange with our would-be host teachers student-made videos depicting a typical day in their schools. Once receiving the videos from their counterparts in Japan, one thing our students can do is to analyze them for CST themes. They may even follow up afterward by email to ask additional questions about the observations they have made.

7) Most of all, students respond to the model that the instructor sets for the students vis-à-vis the CST themes. Instructors who are inspired by CST themes themselves, and understand their own teaching practices in terms of the themes, will convey that to their students in their semester together.

## **Conclusion**

Central to the mission of Catholic higher education are the themes of Catholic social teaching. Universities endeavor to engage students in these themes over the course of their undergraduate degrees. Course instructors often test out different ways to engage students in these themes. The design of this particular course capitalizes on the synergy shared between CST themes and

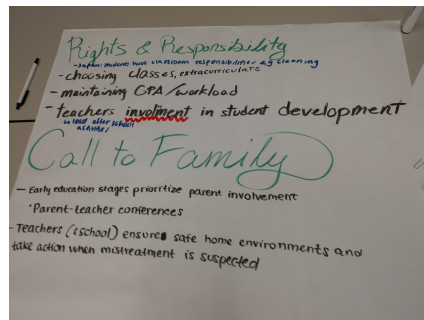
education. The global comparative aspect allows students an opportunity to apply CST themes to familiar and less-familiar contexts, thus deepening their understanding of the themes. This directly serves to advance the mission of Catholic higher education.

At the same time, the value of cross-disciplinarity operates in both directions. The success of this course suggests the potential for university instructors in neighboring disciplines to bring CST themes into their course curricula. This would be accomplished by identifying points of articulation between their subject discipline and the CST themes. Given the intended universality of CST themes, points of interface are not difficult to find. As educators at Catholic universities seek meaningful connections to CST themes in their individual departments and programs, they collectively realize the mission-driven work of the Catholic university.

## APPENDIX A: Group Discussion Posters

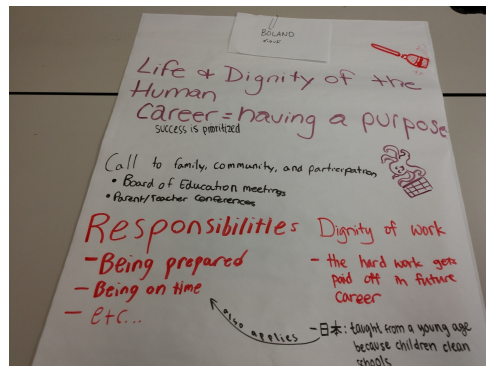
**Figure 1**

Group Aquinas



**Figure 2**

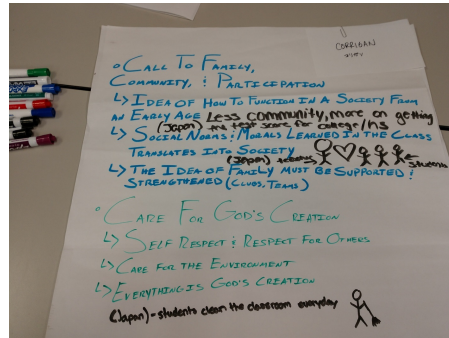
Group Boland





**Figure 3**

Group Corrigan



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