



Writing Curriculum for Catholic Schools

A Framework

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FOREWORD

Dear Colleagues in Catholic Education:

Recently, the Institute for Catholic Education published a booklet entitled *Curriculum Matters - A Resource for Catholic Educators*, a seminal document for the constituents of the Catholic educational community.

This document *Writing Curriculum for Catholic Schools: A Framework* is intended to be used as a "Coles Notes" to accompany *Curriculum Matters*. It will be extremely useful for Catholic educators who are writing units of curriculum for any subject area in Ontario Catholic schools.

Representatives from all four Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperatives were involved in the preparation of these materials. Members of the Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative spent many additional hours to prepare this user friendly document which has remained faithful to our Catholic Tradition.

May your curriculum writing bear fruit for the young people in our separate schools in the year 2000 and beyond.

Joan Cronin, g.s.i.c.
Executive Director
Institute for Catholic Education

INTRODUCTION

This document has an eminently practical concern, the "translation" of philosophical, theological and methodological reflections on the contexts of Catholic education in Ontario into a clear framework which will assist and guide writers and practitioners in the preparation and delivery of curriculum materials suitable for Catholic schools.

For such a framework to be authentic, it must clearly reflect the faith foundations and convictions of the Catholic belief community including a vision of the learner as an inter-dependent, others-centred and prophetic witness who participates fully in the Catholic faith community. For the framework to be also practical, the faith foundations must be presented in terms which are comprehensible and useful for educators who are engaged in the actual task of preparing curriculum. The struggle to be both authentic and practical governs the presentation of the materials in the four sections of this document.

I. The first section of material proposes to summarize and present some basic indicators of Catholic curriculum. The indicators are based in the reflections of *Curriculum Matters: A Resource for Catholic Educators* (I.C.E., 1996), and are presented in a series of six statements describing some demonstrable intentions of Catholic curriculum. These statements attempt to embody a set of foundational assumptions upon which all Catholic curriculum must be implicitly or explicitly structured. It is not intended that every piece of curriculum explicate the foundations. What is intended, however, is that all Catholic curriculum be intentionally and implicitly faithful to the foundations. The assumptions are deeply rooted in the belief and practice of the Catholic community and will, at times, differ from the assumptions which underlie general public education. It is essential that curriculum produced by and for Catholic schools remain accountable to the principles upon which our faith and our claim for separate education rest.

II. The second section compresses the six statements into simple focus words. These focus words are intended as a kind of "short-hand" or summary of the more complex ideas expressed in the first section. It is hoped that the use of these words will assist curriculum writers to differentiate more clearly a variety of concerns and perspectives that contribute to the texture of Catholic curriculum. These words will become titles for a reflection process presented in the third section of material.

III. Section three provides curriculum writers with a fuller explanation of the six descriptors from the previous section. This material is intended to encourage personal reflection and consideration of what makes Catholic curriculum distinctive. Again, there is no intention that all the identified elements will appear in every curriculum document. There is, however, an expectation that all Catholic curriculum will remain intentionally accountable to the basic foundations represented here.

IV. The final section deals with the question of the assessment and evaluation process within a Catholic learning environment. It invites curriculum writers to reflect on how they attend to issues of dignity and human development, prayerfulness and justice, community and values.

Section I

CATHOLIC CURRICULUM

The philosophical and theological principles of Catholic education are set out in *Curriculum Matters*. What follows is an attempt to indicate how those principles can find a demonstrable expression in curriculum materials. There is no intention that all of these principles be made explicit in every curriculum document. It is important, however, that the principles are implicit and foundational to everything taught in a Catholic school.

The uniqueness of Catholic curriculum is demonstrable in learning opportunities and materials which intentionally:

- ▶ *support, invite and enhance the faith life of students as a relationship with God the Father, through the Son, Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit;*
- ▶ *involve students in community, especially the community of the People of God, Church;*
- ▶ *challenge students to examine and explore their lives in relation to specific gospel values as reflected in Church teachings;*
- ▶ *encourage and enable the development and use of individual gifts and abilities for the service of the whole community, the Church and society;*
- ▶ *offer a view of life, which despite suffering and evil, remains hopeful because it is rooted in God's promise and love in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and*
- ▶ *call students to celebrate the signs and mystery of God's presence among us through liturgy and sacrament, personal prayer, reflection and moral living.*

Section II

The six previous statements are compressed into six focus expressions. These expressions serve as a simple "reminder" of various elements which can demonstrate the distinctiveness of Catholic curriculum. These simple expressions will become titles for a variety of reflections in section three.

**CURRICULUM MATERIALS
FOR
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
MUST BE DESIGNED TO
SUPPORT STUDENTS
IN LEARNING EXPERIENCES
WHICH ENHANCE:**

BELIEF,

COMMUNITY,

LIFE CHALLENGE,

SHARED EXCELLENCE,

HOPE

&

CELEBRATION.

Section III

This material is intended to encourage personal reflection and consideration of various elements and perspectives which distinguish curriculum as Catholic. The titles in this section are related to the six statements of Section I. It is hoped that this reflection process will assist teachers and curriculum writers in clarifying intentional integration and in reviewing curriculum permeation.

BELIEF

Catholic Curriculum invites, supports and enhances the faith life of students as a relationship with God the Father, through the Son, Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Images of God are always expressed in human terms which help students to understand some aspects of the essence of God and how he relates to us. However, human understandings are limited and to faithfully present images of God, Catholic Curriculum must humbly submit to the truth that God is beyond all human understanding and knowledge. This invites curriculum writers to present images of God that are full of wonder, strength, awe, mystery, wisdom, and love.

The following questions are meant to help curriculum writers reflect on how their curriculum materials *explicitly or implicitly* represent basic Catholic beliefs about God.

How will this curriculum reflect the existence of God, God's relationship to the world, the work and mission of Jesus, or the activity of the Holy Spirit in creation, history, communities and ourselves?

Which of the following words will best describe the image of God the Creator to be implicitly or explicitly presented in this curriculum document:

omnipotent	mystery	wise	understanding
imminent	all-knowing	awesome	all merciful
absent	creative	liberating	apathetic
caring	loving	just	inviting
judgemental	active	passive	authoritarian
challenging	embarrassing	purposeful	personal

How will this curriculum document portray the values and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth in the lives of the students?

**How will this curriculum material invite students to understand the practical meaning of belief as it applies to their relationships with God, self, others and the environment?
How will this curriculum deal with the secularism of our culture?**

How will this curriculum present a God that makes claims on us?

RESOURCE:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ottawa, 1994, Part One: Section II and particularly Articles 51-73, 96-150, 151-162.

COMMUNITY

Catholic Curriculum involves students in community, especially the community of the People of God, Church.

The Church is at its core the people who have been gathered by God through the mystery of the life, death and resurrection of Christ into a community of God's people. This people shares its stories through scripture and tradition, struggles to fashion a faithful community of justice and peace, and seeks to be the place where humanity rediscovers its unity and salvation.

The following questions are meant to help curriculum writers reflect on how their curriculum materials *explicitly or implicitly* invite students to belong to the Church. This belief will inform any curriculum matter dealing with issues that unite people into healthy human communities, that express care for one another, or that invite a service response.

What views will be expressed in this curriculum about communities, the interrelation of peoples, nations and cultures of the world, the Church, other churches, faiths or religions?

How will this curriculum portray the relationship between individuals and communities?

How will the life of the people of God as expressed in Scripture and Tradition be used to examine contemporary ways of living and nurture lifestyles marked by faith, hope and love?

How will this curriculum invite students to participate in the domestic church of their family and the local parish and to work toward becoming a faithful community?

How will this curriculum material enable skills that promote respectful unity rather than division (relationships, participation, dialogue, collaboration, cooperation, ecumenism, race and ethno cultural issues, anti-violence issues, equity issues, harassment, conflict resolution, etc.) and the betterment of society?

RESOURCE:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ottawa, 1994. Part I, Section II Article 9 and Articles 164-188.

LIFE CHALLENGE

Catholic Curriculum challenges students to examine contemporary ways of living and explore their lives in relation to specific gospel values as reflected in Church teachings.

Scripture challenges us to raise questions about the authenticity of our own lives. How does this style of living or this particular activity align with the Good News of freedom and participation in the life of God? What we say we believe must be reflected in the way we live.

The following questions are meant to help curriculum writers reflect on how their curriculum materials *explicitly or implicitly* invite students to question the alignment or consistency of *what is said* with *what is lived*.

What views will be expressed in this curriculum about a Christian lifestyle or lifestyles in general? What will be the underlying spirituality?

How will the values, perspectives and examples presented in this curriculum reflect the teachings of the Gospel, our Catholic tradition and the Church today?

How will this curriculum equip students to recognize "double standards" and discrepancies between word and deed, walk and talk?

How will this curriculum attend to issues of peace, social justice and human dignity?

How will this curriculum use the social or moral teachings of the Church?

RESOURCE:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ottawa, 1994, Part I, Section II, Paragraph 6 and 7, Part III Section I and Articles 367-423.

SHARED EXCELLENCE

Catholic Curriculum encourages and enables the use and development of individual gifts and abilities for the service of the whole community, the Church and society.

The gift of dignity and worth, shared by all, implies a responsibility to fashion caring relationships which are respectful, just and life-affirming. In this way we actively develop and express gratitude to God for the many gifts and abilities which we share in our concern for the common good.

The following questions are meant to help curriculum writers reflect on how their curriculum materials *explicitly or implicitly* deal with the issues of human dignity, stewardship of the earth and communities, difference, gifts and skills (athletic, artistic, social, spiritual, intellectual, etc.), privilege (wealth, power, prestige, etc.), human rights.

How will this curriculum help students to recognize the inherent worth of every individual and all of creation as a pure gift of a loving and faithful God?

How will these classroom materials present responsible human persons (i.e. able to make decisions and choices) who live in relationships with one another and all of creation?

In what ways will this curriculum encourage students to strive for excellence in the use and development of personal gifts to serve the community?

How will this material assist students to develop loving relationships with self, God, others and creation?

RESOURCE:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ottawa, 1994, Part I, Section II, Paragraphs 6 and 7, Part III Section I and Articles 222-227, 1877-1948.

HOPE

Catholic Curriculum projects a view of life which despite suffering and evil remains hopeful because it is rooted in God's promise and love in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Church believes that Jesus is risen from the dead and will return to complete creation and the human community is the foundation of all Christian hope. The story of God's faithful promise of freedom and fullness of life is what invites and allows Christians to embrace a way of living which is directed toward prayer, reflection, witness, service of others and care of creation. It is this hope that gives our lives meaning, direction and certitude.

The following questions are meant to help curriculum writers reflect on how their curriculum materials ***explicitly or implicitly*** deal with the past and the future, disease and death, hope in the face of tragedy, the project of human history, and with projects of human betterment such as technology, planning, human engineering, etc.

What image of the future will this project hold out? Who will be given control of the future (technology, power politics, economic forces, fate, advertisements, God) in this curriculum? Who or what will have effective and determining power in this curriculum?

What is the place of human planning for the future?

How will this material make the future look fearful or hopeful?

How will this curriculum material present fearful experiences (e.g. death, war, disease, age, civil strife, natural disasters) in relation to Christian hope in God's promises of freedom and life?

How will this curriculum present ways of bettering the human condition?

RESOURCE:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ottawa, 1994, Part I, Section II Article 9, Paragraph 5, 10, 11 and 12, Part II Section I and Articles 668-682.

CELEBRATION

Catholic Curriculum celebrates the signs and mystery of God's presence among us through liturgy and sacraments, personal prayer, reflection and moral living.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of all Christian living. Everything in our lives draws us to the Eucharist where we become truly God's holy people. We also celebrate through prayer, reflection and other liturgies. All these celebrations acknowledge God's loving and caring relationship with us, express our praise and thanksgiving and invite us to fulfil the will of God.

The following questions are meant to help curriculum writers reflect on how their curriculum materials *explicitly or implicitly* deal with the relationship to the holy and sacred in our midst, spiritual responses to human living, spirituality, celebrations, festivities, important moments in the lives of people, the symbolic, etc.

How will this curriculum material acknowledge the gifts of creation and our gratitude to God, especially through the celebration of Sunday Eucharist?

How will this curriculum material recognize the wonder and deep mystery of the physical world and human relationships? How will it encourage students to see God in the world about them?

How will this curriculum material celebrate and model the triumph of what gives life, growth and self-realization for all (i.e. God's will for peace and justice in the world, justice, mercy, peace, growth, etc.) as it is celebrated in the liturgy?

How will this curriculum material acknowledge and promote ways of expressing our relationship with God through the transcendent, such as rituals, liturgy, prayer, meditation, spirituality, moral living and celebration?

RESOURCE:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ottawa, 1994, Part IV and Articles 279-354.

Section IV

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

As educators in a Catholic school entrusted with handing on faith to the next generation, we have a vision of what students need to know, do and be like in order to participate as fully as possible in the Catholic community, both now and in the future. Learning outcomes are the behaviours that the program is designed to instill and develop. The achievement of expected outcomes will be enabled by a spiralling process that moves through:

- exploration of a personal and shared experience;
- acquisition of information;
- application to lived situations;
- reflection in prayer; and
- expression in action.

"At each stage, teachers, students and families should determine the degree of success in achieving these goals; where there is insufficient progress, teachers look for reasons and find suitable remedies. It is essential that this evaluation be seen as a common responsibility and it be carried out faithfully." (*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 1988, p.54.)

Curriculum writers need to reflect upon how their curriculum project attends to the following questions about the assessment and evaluation of student work within a Catholic curriculum:

How will the dignity of the child be respected in the assessment and evaluation process?

How will the assessment and evaluation of student work in this curriculum project help students to collaborate together to support each other's learning?

How will this curriculum project's assessment and evaluation invite students to be successful with their own strengths?

In what ways will the assessment and evaluation strategies facilitate the active involvement of student, teacher and parent? How will students be involved in the setting up of goals and the development of criteria for student achievement?

How will the reporting procedure involve the parent(s) or guardian(s) as supporters of the children's learning?

In what ways will the assessment and evaluation strategies encourage and maintain a standard of excellence for each student's learning?

How will the learning be connected with real life situations? How will the evaluation strategies strengthen connections with an integrated Catholic lifestyle? How will the evaluation strategies enable the students to demonstrate the integration of their self-understanding, faith, religious knowledge and the particular curriculum area?

How will the assessment tools include methods and procedures that offer students a creative range of classroom and "outside the classroom" opportunities for demonstrating achievement of outcomes which are consistent with effective participation in the Catholic community?

How will the assessment and evaluation strategies enable the student's knowledge and understanding of pertinent Church teaching to be measured in this curriculum?