

+ A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

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Heart, Head and Hands: A Framework for Considering Contemporary Issues in Catholic Education

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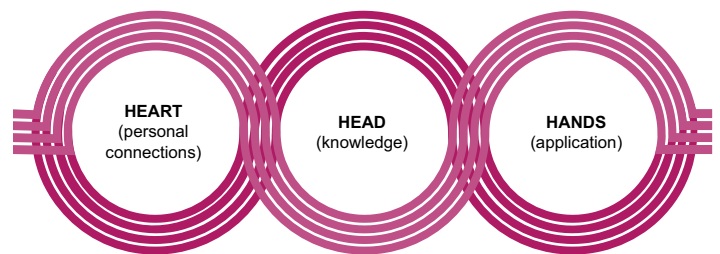
“As Catholic educators, “we are called to be in this place — whatever this place is — to make this place more just, more peaceful because we are here. There is more wisdom because we are here.” (Sr. Elizabeth Davis, Sister of Mercy)

“ In our schools today, we plant seeds as the beginnings of a new future. As Catholic educators we sometimes find ourselves working in hard ground, and to be sure, signs of growth are sometimes slow to appear. But we are attentive to our work, believing in the growth, tending to the seeds so that their harvest time can surely come. As we nurture our students’ growth in faith, we consciously reflect on our past, meaningfully participate in the present and courageously shape our future.

Why is it important to address the challenges that face Catholic Education at this time?

- To find the courage to name and articulate issues that face our Catholic Schools in the 21st century
- To be knowledgeable and ready to communicate our distinctive Catholic voice
- To serve our Catholic community and respond confidently to the needs of students
- To work together to address issues effectively

- while maintaining our Catholic identity
- To respond to challenges posed by current realities
 - To effectively understand changing societal influences within our Catholic context
 - To successfully integrate faith and contemporary culture
 - To nurture and develop leaders who express their faith in very tangible ways



Framework for Understanding and Responding to Contemporary Issues:

Catholic educators begin with their own story and reflect on how their personal story fits into our faith story. We inspire our students to connect the faith story to their own lives, create meaning for the present and ignite hope for the future. The framework of “Heart, Head and Hands” integrates

our Catholic faith story with our personal story and serves as a vibrant process that empowers us to teach, challenge and nurture our students to feel

God's love. The framework creates an approach for educators to address and respond to contemporary issues.

HEART	HEAD	HANDS
How do you personally relate to this issue?	What are the myths and facts about this issue?	How do you give students voice about this issue?
What personal biases do you hold?	What does the Catholic curriculum teach about this matter?	How do you create a safe space for students to acknowledge and share their struggles?
How can you address your biases to move your own thinking forward?	What Catholic resources can be accessed to find out more about this subject?	What actions can you take to dispel misconceptions that students may hold?
What do you know about church teaching on this matter?	What are the students' perceptions about this issue?	How do you explain church teachings on this matter to students?
What do you need to do to bring your heart to a place of peace and acceptance about this challenge?	How do you respond to parents about their concerns?	What activities can students take part in to promote a deeper understanding of this issue?
What next steps do you need to take to resolve this issue for yourself?	How do you seek wisdom and provide counselling to students?	How do your actions support the students in achieving the Catholic Graduate Expectations?

Renewing the Promise

In November of 2017, more than 650 participants of our Catholic community gathered for a provincial symposium to explore the theme, ***Renewing the Promise***. The dialogue was designed to provide opportunities for open conversation in which we would name the challenges we face as a community, better understand the changing context for our mission, and identify and build consensus around new possibilities to shape our future. The symposium was structured around the principles for discerning conversations. Four sessions included opportunities for journaling, personal reflections, rounds of structured sharing, and group dialogue and discussion.



The tables presented on pages 3-5 address the key themes which emerged from the discerning conversations that took place at the symposium.

THEME #1		MOVING TO ACTION
Challenge	To communicate the Gospel using effective means.	
Insights from the Catholic Tradition	...“human being are the living sparks, the thinking hearts, called to be co-creators with God in shaping the world.” – St. Hildegard of Bingen	
Catholic Educators Response	Each of us needs to take ownership for the students in our schools.	
Heart Feels	We all need to work together (student, parent, educator, priest) so people feel loved by God, for who they are.	
Head Thinks	How can we partner with the parish to engage our students and extend and deepen their faith?	
Hands Do	Build a community that is welcoming and inclusive and centers around the life and teachings of Jesus.	

THEME #2		NURTURE COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS
Challenge	To foster relationships and a deeper sense of community.	
Insights from the Catholic Tradition	Community enables us to welcome and help people and we do this best by working together in relational trust.	
Catholic Educators Response	Create a school culture that creates space for everyone and accepts all.	
Heart Feels	Care deeply about the well-being of all people.	
Head Thinks	Be willing to learn from people whose perspectives are different from our own.	
Hands Do	Promote a way of life rooted in call to service. Integrate social issues in the learning process.	

THEME #3		REKINDLE MISSION AND VALUES
Challenge	To inspire the students to love God more.	
Insights from the Catholic Tradition	Each person is essentially good and made in the divine image.	
Catholic Educators Response	Enthusiastically teach about Jesus, our faith tradition and the powerful connection this has to our lives.	
Heart Feels	Our faith is something wonderful and exciting to know about.	
Head Thinks	There is a great mystery here and we need to help our student make meaning and relate to it to their own lives.	
Hands Do	Provide learning experiences that engage students to do God’s work and feel God’s presence in the school community.	

THEME #4 DEVELOP FAITH AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY	
Challenge	To infuse faith formation into all our interactions with students, staff and parents.
Insights from the Catholic Tradition	We are of infinite worth and dignity - we are gifts. Our very being gives glory to God.
Catholic Educators Response	Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible. – St. Francis of Assisi.
Heart Feels	Trust in the slow work of God.
Head Thinks	Christ has no body on earth but ours and we need many opportunities to develop our faith.
Hands Do	Give each person assurance and support as they struggle and grow in faith.

THEME #5 LIVE FAITH	
Challenge	To be genuine in our relationships with each other, the wider community and God.
Insights from the Catholic Tradition	He [Jesus] burns with the desire to come into your heart. – St. Therese de Lisieux
Catholic Educators Response	Be open to recognizing and proclaiming Jesus and explicit about sharing the hope that is in our hearts.
Heart Feels	We need to be faithful to our core beliefs and live our faith everyday.
Head Thinks	Walk our talk, share our gifts and invite others to do so.
Hands Do	Teach Gospel values as part of the learning process. Engage students in virtues and values formation/affective learning.

THEME #6 ENGAGE STUDENT VOICE	
Challenge	To engage meaningfully with students and meet them where they are on their faith journey.
Insights from the Catholic Tradition	A Catholic outlook is open to being enriched by the entire breath of human knowledge and wisdom.
Catholic Educators Response	The most significant person is the student sitting across from you right now. Ask the student, listen and engage their voice.
Heart Feels	Engaging student voice is an opportunity to deepen participation in their faith.
Head Thinks	“You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.” – Thomas Merton
Hands Do	Empower students to ask questions, share their wonderings and offer opinions in classrooms where they can confidently express challenges of faith, be respectfully heard and feel included.

THEME #7	ENCOURAGE AND NURTURE LEADERSHIP
Challenge	To nurture and develop educators who show tangible expressions of their faith.
Insights from the Catholic Tradition	Real leadership is about enabling teachers and students to use talents and abilities to deepen and spread Catholic Education.
Catholic Educators Response	“Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.” St. Catherine of Siena
Heart Feels	We need to deepen the formation of leaders and empower them to bring the message of Jesus’ life and teachings to today’s school.
Head Thinks	Leaders have a strong sense of core responsibilities and commitment to the faith growth of everyone in the school community.
Hands Do	The school is Jesus’ message and that message continues to be alive and well in Catholic Education. Welcome the gifts people bring and recognize leadership as shepherding and serving those we lead.

Summary

The Catholic education symposium in 2017 encouraged individual reflection, and communal discernment. It posed the broad question, “How is each of us called to respond to God’s invitation, in this time and place?” Seven key themes that impact on Catholic education today have been identified through the process, and presented in the preceding tables. The insights and results that emerged from the symposium are presented in more detail in a summary report developed for The Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) and Office Provincial de l’Éducation de la foi Catholique de l’Ontario (OPÉCO). Each of these emergent themes reflects a distinct conversational thread, yet each of the themes is interrelated.

In May of this year, the bishops of Ontario will offer a pastoral letter, *Renewing the Promise*, which will further contribute to the ongoing conversations, as they offer their insight and encouragement to the work of Catholic educators in support of the mission of the Church.

Neither the themes and insights from the symposium, nor the pastoral letter, are intended to bring closure to the important conversation that has

begun, but rather to serve as a point of departure for deeper dialogue, and creative response at a local level. In order to support and further contribute to this ongoing dialogue, a monograph series is currently under development through the Institute for Catholic Education to deconstruct and go deeper with some of the challenges presented.

Each of us is invited to continue the conversations initiated prior to, and explored during the symposium, within our local school communities. As individuals, as part of Catholic education communities, and as part of local parishes and dioceses we can continue to reflect and to engage in this honest and respectful dialogue. As we remain open to all those around us, keeping the conversation alive, we come to recognize our shared responsibilities for this mission, and to identify our personal faith needs and opportunities for growth. We remain grounded in the present, engaging joyfully with the students we serve in our Catholic schools today, while entering into ongoing communal discernment to positively shape the future.

Continuing the Conversation

In an atmosphere of trust and respect, we seek to understand, and we find shared purpose when we listen actively and speak from the heart. When we engage with one another in conversation, we honour and welcome each person, and each person's point of view in the conversation should be received respectfully, and considered seriously. This presence to each other allows deeper, more meaningful communication and invites the Spirit's involvement as we seek wisdom and understanding.

The suggested approach to the conversation is universally applicable; always respectful, always with constructive intent, and always an expression of a sincere desire to understand. The focusing questions that prompt and guide the conversation, and the content of the dialogue that ensues, is more a reflection of specific time, place, and situation. Contextualized within a school community, a faith community, a School Board, an organization or group, the specific questions to be explored emerge from the shared history, current challenges, and expressed needs of the community.

The "Heart, Head and Hands" Framework is intended as a tool for ongoing reflection and dialogue about contemporary issues in Catholic Education. By coming together as community, engaging in prayer and building relational trust through ongoing dialogue, we can meaningfully integrate our faith with our experience of contemporary culture, and find opportunities to make this world better, more just, and more peaceful because of our presence.

How can we help Catholic Educators articulate what is distinctive about Catholic Education?

How can we empower our students to be able to articulate their Catholic faith?

How can we develop deeper partnerships within our Catholic community?

How do we make Catholic culture visible in our schools?

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