

A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

Curriculum Series | Monograph #2 Fall 2019 | Published by Institute for Catholic Education

Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations: A Framework for Curriculum Development

by Marcelle DeFreitas

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” (Isaiah 43:19)

Wilderness in 2019 is characterized by an uncertain and unpredictable future shaped by globalization and rapid developments in technology and educators in Catholic schools in Ontario are seizing opportunities to get students ready to ‘do a new thing.’

Grounded in the belief that their identity comes from God, students in today’s classrooms are learning to be open and ready to navigate through a future of uncertainty by assuming responsibility for participating in the world, and contributing to the common good. By teaching that “life is an unearned gift and that a person entrusted with life does not own it but is called to protect and cherish it”,¹ Catholic educators invite students to internalize a guiding purpose that leads them to influence people, events and circumstances for the better. Nurtured by teachers and parents to be sensitive to and respect the diversity in values, ideas and points of view of others, learners then interact in mutually supportive relationships helping each other to progress toward

their valued goals. Students learn to recognize each other as a ‘you’ and themselves as a part of an ‘us’ and together they strive to be ‘streams in the wasteland.’

“Educators deliver updated curriculum and programs developed by the Ministry of Education, but in Catholic schools, always through a lens of faith that reflects a distinctively Catholic worldview.”

Catholic Curriculum

Students today live and learn in an “era characterised by a new explosion of scientific knowledge and a growing array of societal problems. Educators can make the difference as to whether students embrace the challenges they are

confronted with or whether they are defeated by them.”² Educators deliver updated curriculum and programs developed by the Ministry of Education, but in Catholic schools, always through a lens of faith that reflects a distinctively Catholic worldview. Catholic curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 12 continues to evolve, developed by Catholic educators and supported by the Ontario bishops and Catholic education partners to both reflect and respond to our times. Catholic curriculum is “much more than policy documents and support

materials. At its core, it reveals fundamental beliefs and values”³ about the purpose and character of Catholic education. These beliefs and values “form students in understanding how faith permeates all aspects of life and has the ability to transform culture.”⁴

Designed to invite students to engage with the wisdom and faith of the community, Catholic curriculum supports educators as they teach students to make meaning for their lives in particular cultural settings today with both the opportunities and the constraints imposed on them. As they grow in understanding of their own identity as individuals and as members of the community, they are guided by wisdom and faith. Wisdom is understood in the biblical sense of ‘living in right relationship’ and how that wisdom has been passed on from one generation to the next as a guide to everyday living.

“Wisdom and faith live together in creative tension, constantly challenging each other in making sense of everyday life. Catholic curriculum seeks to explore the creative tensions inherent in this relationship, and by showing how this relationship functions when making sense of life.”

Faith is also about living well but depends on having access to a source of wisdom in the divine that lies outside of everyday human experiences. “Wisdom and faith live together in creative tension,

constantly challenging each other in making sense of everyday life. Catholic curriculum seeks to explore the creative tensions inherent in this relationship, and by showing how this relationship functions when making sense of life.”⁵ Educators negotiate Catholic curriculum to help students reinterpret the experiences of their everyday lives. They teach students to make sense of their lives (wisdom) and to express the hope that is in their hearts (faith) as they form their own identity.

Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations (OCSGEs)

Since 1998, The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations (OCSGEs) have provided a compelling aspirational vision of the learner, and Catholic educators have used them in a variety of creative ways including as a framework for designing curriculum. Rooted in a distinctive Christian anthropology that grounds them in the Catholic tradition, the OCSGEs succeed in providing a language that brings clarity and a renewed sense of distinctiveness and purpose to teaching and learning in publicly funded Catholic schools. The seven overall, and fifty-two specific, expectations continue to provide a lens for Catholic educators to discern and interpret the signs of the times, supporting young people to make sense of their lives. They inform collective efforts to respond in a distinctively

Christian manner to the challenges of the world in order to serve Catholic students and families. They hold out the potential of grounding everything in Catholic schools in the broader wisdom and mission of the Church and, most importantly, in the message and person of Jesus Christ who is integrated into the entire curriculum and life of the school.

OCSGEs as a Framework for Curriculum

When used as a framework for designing curriculum, OCSGEs support educators to fulfill two objectives: to nurture students as active contributors to the common good and to support ongoing pursuit of improved achievement and well-being. Inherent in the OCSGEs is the understanding that “today’s learners need to exercise agency in their own learning and in their lives. This agency or implied sense of responsibility to participate in the world and influence people events and circumstances for the better,”⁶ requires the ability to frame a guiding purpose. For Catholic students this guiding purpose is grounded in the belief that they are loved by God and made in God’s image and likeness.

The OCSGEs act as a framework to assist educators in making authentic curriculum connections to this guiding purpose while meeting the learning needs of students so that they become active participants in their own learning. The OCSGEs

are student-centered rather than subject-centered and this approach has been the driving force behind school-based curriculum development in Ontario where educators readily respond to the emphasis on contextualizing learning.

The table below demonstrates how OCSGEs may be used as a religious framework for curriculum development. Aligning the OCSGEs with the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) demonstrates the authentic connections between Catholic schools' vision of the learner and the Ministry of Education curriculum. Reflecting the voices and the experiences of educators across the province, The School Effectiveness Framework 2013 "supports educators in their ongoing pursuit of improved student achievement and well-being. In addition, it is a tool

for reflective and informed pedagogy and school improvement planning within a safe, accepting and inclusive learning environment."⁷ The SEF priorities listed below are supported and enhanced by the seven overall and fifty-two indicators of the OCSGEs.

The left-hand column in the table lists the OCSGEs while the top row of the remaining five columns detail the curriculum, teaching and learning priorities in the Ontario School Effectiveness Framework. Below each of these priorities, the chart shows how the fifty-two indicators of the OCSGEs inform those priorities for Catholic Educators. "Only in this way can they be nurtured and encouraged to become who they are meant to be: persons of dignity and freedom, created in the image and likeness of God as modelled in Jesus Christ."⁸

Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations

"We must grasp firmly the challenge of providing a kind of education whose curriculum will be inspired more by reflection than by technique, more by a search for wisdom than by the accumulation of information." (Pope Saint John Paul II)

Ontario's Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Priorities in the School Effectiveness Framework

"Innovative teaching practices consist of three elements: student-centered pedagogy (including knowledge building, self-regulation and assessment, collaboration, and skilled communication); learning beyond the classroom (including problem-solving and real-world innovation); and use of Information and Communication Technology (in service of specific and concrete learning goals)." (Michael Fullan)



Vision of the Learner — the Graduate is expected to be:





All students can learn, progress and achieve: multiple and varied opportunities are provided for students to demonstrate learning; students learn, progress and achieve in relation to their goals; students demonstrate and apply their learning in a variety of contexts and forms.


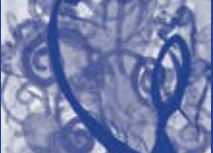

High levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy: students communicate effectively for specific purposes and audiences; instruction is designed to support students in developing capacity for metacognition and understanding how questioning shapes thinking and learning.

Learning is collaborative, innovative and creative; students demonstrate resilience and persistence when faced with challenges; students assume leadership roles when working with authentic problems/projects and incorporate the use of relevant data, tools and experts in and beyond the classroom.

Learning is deepened through student inquiry: learning through problem solving supports students in connecting ideas and developing perceptual understanding; students are provided with regular opportunities for planned, purposeful, accountable talk.

Resources for students are relevant, current, inclusive and bias free: students are supported in recognizing and deconstructing biases in resources; students communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences, using a variety of media and formats.

	All students can learn, progress and achieve:	High levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy:	Learning is collaborative, innovative and creative;	Learning is deepened through student inquiry:	Resources for students are relevant, current, inclusive and bias free:
1. A Discerning Believer Who: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participates in the sacramental life of the church and demonstrates an understanding of the centrality of the Eucharist to our Catholic story. Understands that one's purpose or call in life comes from God and strives to discern and live out this call throughout life's journey. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively reflects on God's Word as communicated through the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Respects the faith traditions, world religions and the life-journeys of all people of good will. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illustrates a basic understanding of the saving story of our Christian faith. Speaks the language of life... "recognizing that life is an unearned gift and that person entrusted with life does not own it but that one is called to protect and cherish it." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeks intimacy with God and celebrates communion with God, others and creation through prayer and worship. Recognizes that "sin, human weakness, conflict and forgiveness are part of the human journey" and that the cross, the ultimate sign of forgiveness is at the heart of redemption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops attitudes and values founded on Catholic social teaching and acts to promote social responsibility, human solidarity and the common good. Integrates faith and life.
2. An Effective Communicator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writes and speaks fluently one or both of Canada's official languages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reads, understands and uses written materials effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses and integrates the Catholic faith tradition, in the critical analysis of the arts, media, technology and information systems to enhance the quality of life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listens actively and critically to understand and learn in light of gospel values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents information and ideas clearly and honestly and with sensitivity to others.
3. A Reflective, Creative and Holistic Thinker Who: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes that there is more grace in our world than sin and that hope is essential in facing all challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examines, evaluates and applies knowledge of interdependent systems (physical, political, ethical, socio-economic and ecological) for the development of a just and compassionate society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates, adapts, evaluates new ideas in light of the common good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thinks reflectively and creatively to evaluate situations and solve problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes decisions in light of the gospel with an informed moral conscience. Adopts a holistic approach to life by integrating learning from various subject areas and experience.
4. A Self-Directed, Responsible, Lifelong Learner Who: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sets appropriate goals and priorities in school, work and personal life. Participates in leisure and fitness activities for a balanced and healthy lifestyle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies effective communication, decision-making, problem-solving, time and resource management skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a confident and positive sense of self and respect for the dignity and welfare of others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds to, manages and constructively influences change in a discerning manner. Examines and reflects on one's personal values, abilities and aspirations influencing choices and opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates flexibility and adaptability. Takes initiative and demonstrates Christian leadership.

	All students can learn, progress and achieve:	High levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy:	Learning is collaborative, innovative and creative;	Learning is deepened through student inquiry:	Resources for students are relevant, current, inclusive and bias free:
5. A Collaborative Contributor Who: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works effectively as an interdependent team member. Develops one's God-given potential and make a meaningful contribution to society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieves excellence, originality, and integrity in one's own work and supports these qualities in the work of others. Applies skills for employability, self-employment and entrepreneurship relative to Christian vocation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respects the rights, responsibilities and contributions of self and others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thinks critically about the meaning and purpose of work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finds meaning, dignity, fulfillment and vocation in work which contributes to the common good. Exercises Christian leadership in the achievement of individual and group goals.
6. A Caring Family Member Who: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministers to the family, school, parish and wider community through service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes human intimacy and sexuality as God-given gifts, to be used as the creator intended. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values and honors the important role of the family in society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values and nurtures opportunities for family prayer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relates to family members in a loving, compassionate and respectful manner.
7. A Responsible Citizen Who: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes the sacredness of life. Exercises the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship; acts morally and legally as a person formed in Catholic traditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respects and affirms the diversity and interdependence of the world's peoples and cultures. Respects the environment and uses resources wisely. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepts accountability for one's own actions. Contributes to the common good; respects the environment and uses resources wisely. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeks and grants forgiveness. Respects and understands the history, cultural heritage and pluralism in contemporary society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts morally and legally as a person formed in Catholic traditions. Witnesses Catholic social teaching by promoting equality, democracy, and solidarity for a just peaceful and compassionate society.

Overall Expectations: 52 Indicators of the vision of the learner in the OCSGEs

Summary

The teaching and learning priorities in the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) when aligned with the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations (OCSGEs) provide a framework for curriculum

development that ensures the curriculum is permeated by wisdom and faith. The two, SEF and OCSGEs, work together to support the formation of the whole person of the student. For example, as an educator in a Catholic school supports students in

“Teaching students to live wisely and faithfully in a culture that continually reshapes their everyday world and defines what is ‘normal’ provides the foundation for students to make sense of their lives and reinterpret the ‘normal’ with tested wisdom that helps them to withstand the pressure to be ‘cool.’”⁸

deepening their learning through student inquiry (SEF), they are also ensuring that students are listening actively and critically to understand and learn in light of gospel values (CGE 2a). As an educator in a Catholic school ensures that all students can learn, progress and achieve (SEF), they are also ensuring that they develop their God-given potential and make a meaningful contribution to society while understanding that their purpose in life comes from God and that they should strive to discern and live out this call throughout life's journey (OCSGEs 5c and 1g)

Since they were first developed over 20 years ago, the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations have provided an enduring framework for curriculum development. The vision of the learner is grounded in an understanding of life that is shaped in practical wisdom that defines success, respect and personal well-being centered on the person and message of Jesus Christ. Serving as a navigational instrument for Catholic education, the OCSGEs embody Jesus' message about what it means to be fully human in today's world.

Ontario Catholic schools make evident their distinctive Catholic character guided by a vision of the learner as articulated in the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations. "Since 1998, this common vision guides Ontario Catholic educators to make classroom, school, board and system decisions that will support the ongoing holistic development of each student – body, mind and spirit. An understanding of who the learner is becoming is theologically tied to an understanding of the mandate of Catholic schools.

“For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your descendants and my blessing on your offspring.” (Isaiah 44:3)

This vision of the learner within an understanding of the mandate of Catholic schools permeates all curriculum, in the broad sense of the word, when the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations are used as a religious framework from which to approach the curriculum.”⁹

When OCSGEs are used as a critical lens in the development of curriculum, Catholic educators are able to comprehensively address the curricular expectations set out by The Ministry of Education while ensuring that Catholic schools are truly “places where students can hear Jesus’ invitation to follow him, where they can receive his command to love all people, and where they can realize his presence and his promise to be with them always. Only in this way can they be nurtured and encouraged to become who they are meant to be: persons of dignity and freedom, created in the image and likeness of God as modelled in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

References:

1. *This Moment of Promise*, Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, 1989
2. *The Future of Education and Skills – Education 2030*, OECD Report 2018, pg. 3
3. *Educating the Soul*, Institute for Catholic Education, 1998, pg. 12
4. Gleeson, J. and Goldberg P. (Eds.), *Faith-Based Identity of Catholic Schools*, Routledge 2019, Chapter 6
5. D’Orsa Jim and Theresa, *Catholic Curriculum – A Mission to the Heart of Young People*, Vaughan Publishing, Australia, 2012, pg. 39
6. D’Orsa Jim and Theresa, *Catholic Curriculum – A Mission to the Heart of Young People*, Vaughan Publishing, Australia, 2012, pg. 40
7. *School Effectiveness Framework: A Support for School Improvement and Student Success*, Ministry of Education Ontario, 2013
8. *The Future of Education and Skills – Education 2030*, OECD Report 2018, pg. 4
9. Gleeson, J. and Goldberg P. (Eds.), *Faith-Based Identity of Catholic Schools*, Routledge 2019, Chapter 6
10. *Curriculum Matters*, Institute for Catholic Education, 1996, pg. 21.

Published by:



Ontario Institute for Catholic Education
44 Hunt Street, Suite 2F
Hamilton, Ontario, L8R 3R1

Tel: 905-523-2469
E-mail: office@iceont.ca
© 2019, Printed in Canada