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A Curriculum for the Heart of Young People: A Reflective, Creative and Holistic Thinker

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This fourth monograph in the series, “A Curriculum for the Heart of Young People,” focuses on how the graduate expectation, “A Reflective, Creative and Holistic Thinker” is foundational for Catholic curriculum.

A Reflective, Creative and Holistic Thinkers

“Catholic schools educate students to search for wisdom and discern the truth. On the one hand, today’s students live in a world of untold promise and possibilities of literally reaching for the stars. The world of communication technology has put the world’s knowledge at their fingertips. On the other hand, kids who come daily to our classrooms see, hear, touch, feel and experience few clear universal values which support and hold the world together.”¹ To make sense of the world, today’s student needs to develop an integrated vision of life, seeing the whole through its many parts, and bringing together the different sources of knowledge and experience nurtured by a faith-filled wisdom of the heart. Understanding science, having a cultural awareness, appreciating nature and beauty accompanied by “a burning desire for justice comes from a close and caring contact with the victims of the world’s injustices.”² Everything in the world is connected and “we need to move forward together and make choices that not only benefit *me*, but *us all*. Such change can be scary; moving into an unknown future can be unsettling.”³ Students who are reflective, creative and holistic thinkers make sense of their world by putting the pieces together and truly understanding the importance of their connections with family and friends, the faith community and the environment. Catholic schools, as faith-filled communities, give students hope because Jesus walks with them every step of the way and inspires them to live in loving relationships.

Catholic Curriculum

Young people define their identity through their relationships. Catholic curriculum provides a range of opportunities for students to experience what ‘living in right relationship’ is like. There are “four sets of relationships that define the life-world of

young people — living with family and friends, living in society and a civic community, living as part of a faith community and living as part of the natural environment.”⁴ Catholic curriculum addresses all of these relationships that define the life-world of young people with a focus on Jesus as one who

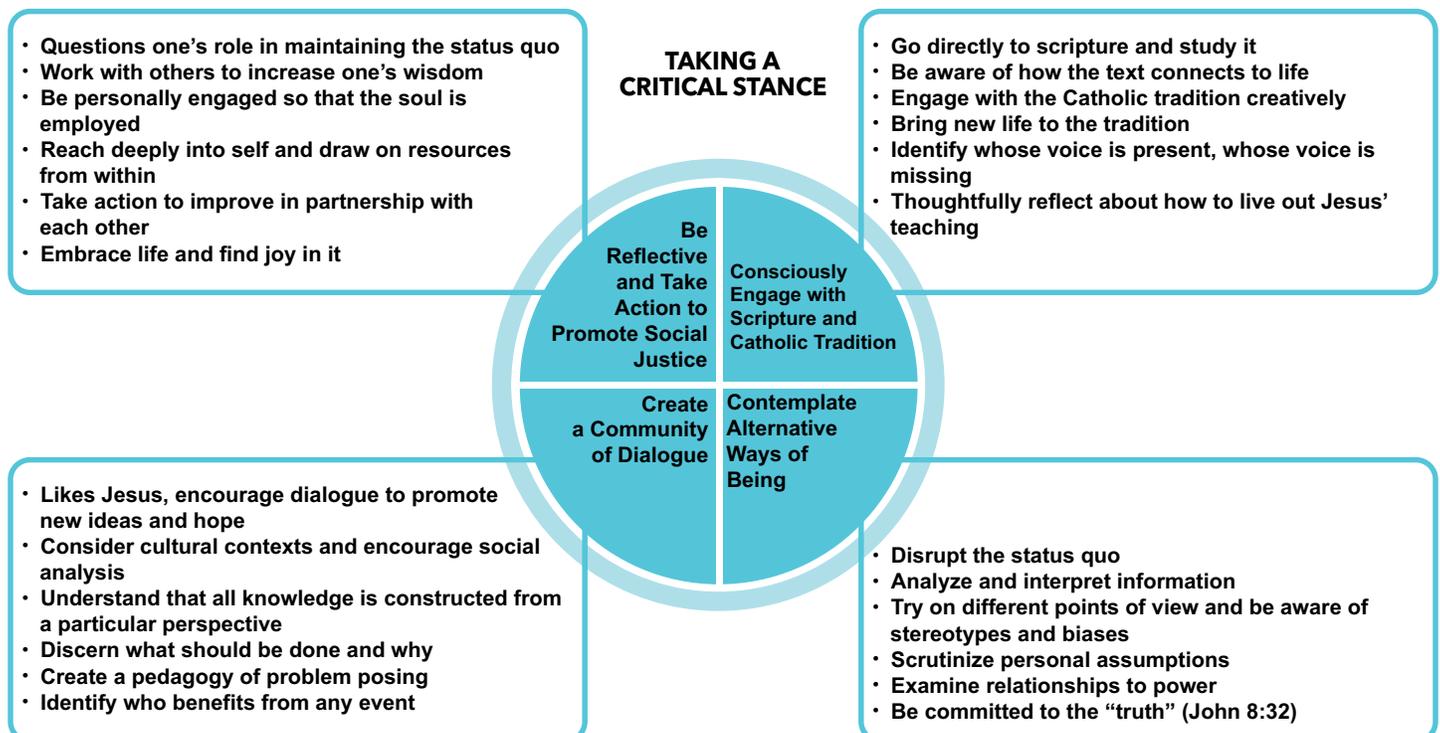
lived in right relationship. Catholic teachers model this message as part of the learning experience and understand the importance of a cross-curricular approach to teaching what it means to be 'living in right relationship.'

The Holistic Thinker

The term "holistic thinking" refers to big picture thinking in which a person recognizes the interconnectedness of various elements that form larger systems, patterns and objects. Catholic schools strive to develop holistic thinkers by engaging the entire person - the head indeed, but heart and hands as well — across the educational spectrum. Teachers engage learner's reason and also their memory and imagination. "Imagination is necessary to perceive the consequences of choices, to imagine what should be or could be and to help create it; responsibility demands imagination."⁵ Engaging student's hearts - their emotions and wills — in the learning dynamic is essential. To touch students' being, to influence who they become in life, requires teaching strategies that engage students' emotions and wills. Learning is personal and about living in right relationship.

Holistic Thinking and Critical Analysis

Critical analysis is a skill that involves the ability to make sense of the information and messages that permeate a students' daily world. Making sense of information can be a daunting task and therefore it is necessary to help students understand information and events by teaching them to develop a critical stance. Taking a critical stance is the students' first step towards truly understanding what is happening in their world. It is about not taking information at face value, detecting biases, understanding other opinions and perspectives, questioning and reading between the lines and then evaluating information in a way that connects with their own lives and helps them form their own personal opinions. The diagram below captures the process involved in developing the skills of critical analysis. Consciously engaging with scripture and the Catholic tradition, contemplating alternate ways of being, creating a community of dialogue and being reflective and taking action to promote social justice are all part of the process of critical analysis in Catholic schools. "Critical thinkers need to be creative—they must anticipate potential implications, generate original approaches and view things from novel perspectives."⁶



Holistic Thinking and the Creative Process

A reflective, creative, and holistic thinker engages in the creative process in order to innovate and improve and find new ideas that benefit all. To engage in the process students need an open mind and an open heart. Creativity begins with challenging an idea and finding inspiration to improve it. God's gift of creativity inspires every part of us to imagine other ways of being and helps us to generate new ideas. Through the feedback process, the teacher helps students to revise and refine their idea, reflect on the success of the new idea and identify potential next steps. To engage in creating, the learning environment encourages dialogue, risk taking and respect for all ideas. To make the world a better place to live, holistic, creative and reflective thinkers are needed to contribute thinking and ideas that impact lifestyles positively and create a common home where all humanity thrives.

Holistic Thinking and Reflection

Reflection is the key to change and being reflective helps us to learn from our own lives in the world and express our own perceptions of what is going on. "When teachers invite learners to reflect on their own lives in the world, they are encouraging students to reach towards wisdom for life."⁷ Being able to pause amidst chaos, to sort through one's own observations and experiences and consider multiple interpretations of events and information is a way to grow and transform thinking and actions. "Scrutinizing one's own assumptions about how the world works and if necessary changing beliefs and understandings is part of being reflective and creating new wisdom."⁸ Reflection through prayer, makes God present in our lives and helps to create meaning and inspiration to take on personal responsibility and look for new ideas and solutions. Reflection allows students to take a look at where they are now and make personal and social transformations. The more reflective, the more the idea and experience of God takes hold, the more new wisdom is embraced.

Values and Actions of a Reflective, Creative and Holistic Thinker:

A. Recognizes there is more grace in our world than sin and that hope is essential in facing all challenges.

Values and Attitudes:

- Strive for equity; Understand principles of fairness; Respect all Life

Actions:

- By developing a view of life that is God centred, one experiences grace
- By understanding that self-worth originates in God's love, one lives in hope.
- By recognizing the sacredness of human life, one builds loving relationships.
- By realizing what is fair and what is not, justice and the common good are supported.
- By listening to God's voice, one finds courage to face all challenges.
- By engaging fully in sacramentality, one nurtures the growth of a spiritual life.

B. Creates, adapts, evaluates new ideas in light of the common good.

Values and Attitudes:

- Engage in dialogue; Care for creation; Practice stewardship; Volunteer in the community.

Actions:

- By synthesizing knowledge, new understandings and innovations emerge.
- By thinking creatively, novel options are discovered.
- By building trusting relationships, dialogue and collaboration occur.
- By caring for health and well-being, strength to help others develops.
- By participating in community service, concern and support for others strengthens all.
- By protecting the gift of nature, care for the environment is demonstrated.

C. Thinks reflectively and creatively to evaluate situations and solve problems.

Values and Attitudes:

- Support the poor and vulnerable; Care for the environment; Empathize with others; Nurture creative thinking

Actions:

- By creating time for prayer, reflection occurs.
- By developing discernment skills, decision making improves.
- By applying a problem-solving process, insights about solutions are made possible.
- By using the creative process, alternative solutions emerge.
- By being an active listener, understanding deepens.
- By involving student voice in problem solving, confidence and self-esteem flourish.

D. Makes decisions in light of gospel values with an informed moral conscience

Values and Attitudes:

- Makes informed decisions; Respects human dignity; Participates in community; Supports the rights of workers

Actions:

- By knowing about Jesus' life, guidance and inspiration are provided.
- By protecting the common good, all people are cared for.
- By appreciating the diversity of cultures, understanding of others deepens.
- By advocating for those who are suffering, the world becomes a better place.
- By taking social responsibility seriously, the quality of everyone's life is improved.
- By reflecting on gospel stories, communal commitment and moral conscience flourishes.

E. Adopts a holistic approach to life by integrating learning from various subject areas and experience

Values and Attitudes:

- Participates fully; Embraces learning and new ways of being; Demonstrates responsible citizenship; Upholds integrity

Actions:

- By integrating knowledge and belief, deeper understanding occurs.
- By analyzing knowledge from a variety of information, understanding is transformed.
- By developing a personal point of view, knowledge and feelings are integrated.
- By reflecting on world culture, wisdom about living together grows.
- By welcoming everyone in the community, safe and accepting environments thrive.
- By promoting responsibility for all, commitment to the truth is realized.

F. Examines, evaluates and applies knowledge of interdependent systems (physical, political, ethical, socio-economic and ecological) for the development of a just and compassionate society

Values and Attitudes:

- Cares for God's creation; Values solidarity; Works for the Common Good; Is intentionally political for freedom

Actions:

- By knowing about Jesus' life, guidance and inspiration are provided.
- By protecting the common good, all people are cared for.
- By appreciating the diversity of cultures, understanding of others deepens.
- By advocating for those who are suffering, the world becomes a better place.
- By taking social responsibility seriously, the quality of everyone's life is improved.
- By reflecting on gospel stories, communal commitment and moral conscience flourishes.

The Thinking Framework and “A Reflective, Creative and Holistic Thinker”

Like Jesus, the reflective, creative and holistic thinker challenges the status quo to improve their own lives and the lives of others. Learning to identify and solve social problems allows students to understand how

to take action and stand up for themselves because they have been nurtured to experience themselves as thinking, creative individuals. The framework below offers possibilities for school communities to achieve a just and compassionate culture grounded in gospel values.

Thinking Framework and The Reflective, Creative Holistic, Thinker	INSPIRE Jesus as role model	UNDERSTAND Understanding Jesus through the lens of heart, head and hands	CONNECT Connecting Jesus’ life and teaching to my life experience	REFLECT Reflecting on my role in my family and community	ENGAGE Taking action to improve the common good for myself and the world
Student	Empowers self and others to stand up for what is right.	Writes and talks about issues that affect their own and others’ lives.	Invites others to analyze their actions to support the common good.	Sees themselves as creative, social beings who are honest and compassionate.	Stands up for justice and sees possibilities for making positive change.
Educator	Teaches critical inquiry and empowers students to stand up for their point of view.	Introduces discussions that affect the concrete reality of students’ lives.	Encourages students to take actions that will make their lives better.	Delves into topics about relationships that surround students’ lives.	Poses and mentors students to solve social problems.
Catholic School Leaders	Motivate staff and students to make school life better for all.	Position students as active participants and uses tension as a resource.	Model self-determination, individual autonomy, and social agency.	Make it possible for staff and students to participate in a culture of hope.	Invite others to become aware of their potential and responsibility as social agents.

Catholic Education in Today’s World

The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations manifest themselves as 21st century competencies and prepare students in Catholic schools to thrive in today’s world. Foundational to living in the world today, students must possess an inquiry habit of mind, and pursue novel ideas and solutions in order to become problem designers. The need to be able to think about “what is” and “what could be” nurtures an entrepreneurial eye for economic and social opportunities. The creation of new knowledge that promotes taking action to improve the quality of life for all brings the teachings of Jesus alive. The

gospel stories, “full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from friendship, justice and faithfulness to others.”⁸ Teaching that actively engages students to live interdependently, value human life, and develop a positive attitude toward the whole person is essential in today’s global and digital world.

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