

A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

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A Curriculum for the Heart of Young People: An Effective Communicator

by Marcelle DeFreitas and Deirdre Kinsella-Biss

This is the third monograph in the series, “A Curriculum for the Heart of Young People,” and it focuses on how the graduate expectation, “An Effective Communicator” is foundational for Catholic curriculum.

An Effective Communicator

Jesus is an effective communicator; the one who effectively communicates God’s love to us. Through prayer Jesus communicated with God and received the very life and love he shared. His whole life was a means of communication, not just his words. He spoke the language of the people so that they could better receive his message and he persevered in teaching the truth. Through prayer, being able to ‘walk the talk’, and adapting language to ensure His message moved others, Jesus demonstrated effective, sensitive, personalized communication.¹ The second Catholic Graduate Expectation invites students to follow Jesus’ lead in becoming effective communicators who listen to others carefully, understand His message and respond critically in the light of the gospels. Jesus models how to present information and ideas clearly and honestly and with sensitivity to others. He sets the stage and serves as a role model for an effective communicator.

Catholic Curriculum

Jesus’ life and message are made present and relevant in Catholic curriculum. Catholic curriculum nurtures a meaningful relationship with Jesus and moves the hearts and minds of young people. Moving hearts and minds begins with communication skills that, “assist students in developing loving relationships with self, God, others and creation”² and involves much more than reading and writing. Students need techniques and strategies that help them create clear, positive messaging and coherency in their “views about the community in which they live, the interrelation of peoples, nations and cultures of the world, the Church, other churches, faiths and religions.”³ Students must find their voice, share

their ideas with others, take a stance on issues and support their opinions with facts and values that reflect Jesus’ life and teaching.”⁴ Being able to see themselves in their learning and make connections to their background, culture and Catholic worldview, students learn how to be effective communicators “in a culture where communication is increasingly commercialized.”⁵

Reading the Signs of the Times

Learning to read the signs-of-the-times is a critical component of faith formation. It requires the ability to apply and transfer knowledge, to recognize patterns in events and information, and to hold in balance local and global affairs, personal and

political issues. It is a necessary feature for those who choose to look at life from a gospel perspective and “build the body of Christ” in the world.⁶ In this sense, Catholic curriculum molds the very “being” of learners — both who they become and how they live in an interdependent world. And the challenge it poses is one of discovering the connection between the values of the gospel and those of the present age. An effective communicator can read the signs of the times, understand, contextualize and connect the gospel messages to find the hope that is in their hearts.

The Learner as Effective Communicator



Being an effective communicator begins with understanding the story of Jesus and recognizing Jesus as the ultimate role model of authentic communication. The Ontario Language Arts and English Curriculum outline the literacy skills necessary to build student comprehension and this second Catholic Graduate Expectation extends the learning beyond the Ontario curriculum documents to promote a unique type of personal communication which reflects our Catholic tradition. Understanding curriculum content through a lens of faith helps

students construct meaning. The way students listen, engage and converse with others, the way they share their ideas and information and the way they advocate for what they believe is shaped by their understanding of Jesus' life and example. Appreciation of the story of Jesus is demonstrated by student action and application to their own life. The pedagogy we use to teach this expectation is a pedagogy that inspires hope. Students are invited to learn through experiences that evoke student reaction and response from their heart, head and hands. The learning is more than content driven. It is learning that reflects the blending of faith, love, knowledge and experience to help students understand, communicate and live the messages modelled in Jesus' life. Learning to be an effective communicator is multifaceted and complex.

Skills and Strategies of An Effective Communicator:

A. Listens actively and critically to understand and learn in light of gospel values.

Skills:

- Actively listens, demonstrates empathy and positivity, uses appropriate vocabulary

Strategies:

- Invite reflections from others
- Give serious consideration to points of view
- Recognize everyone as a child of God
- Welcome everyone's contributions
- Encourage others to express what they know or want to share.
- Listen openly to others' ideas

B. Reads, understands and uses written materials effectively.

Skills:

- Reads and comprehends content, makes sense, understands, questions, makes connections, integrates the message

Strategies:

- Understand the gospel first as a literal story,

- Appreciate the context and setting, the characters, their actions and the conflicts presented
- Question, analyze and make sense of the story
- Recognize the big ideas, messages, themes and intended lessons
- See Jesus as a human being responding to a set of circumstances.
- Integrates the message of the gospel story into one's life

C. Presents information and ideas clearly and honestly and with sensitivity to others.

Skills:

- Speaks clearly, politely, expressively, sensitively, coherently and uses non-verbal cues appropriately to convey meaning

Strategies:

- Engage in meaningful, respectful conversation
- Conduct conversations that build positive relationships
- Pray, reflect, meditate on the message being heard
- Speak with honesty and sensitivity
- Be aware of God's presence in daily life
- Use body language that is invitational

D. Writes and speaks fluently one or both of Canada's official languages.

Skills:

- Vocabulary development, word choice, understanding language patterns and conventions both orally and written, engaging in conversation in both languages

Strategies:

- Use language that affirms the dignity, equality, and value of all people
- Appreciate bilingual communication
- Avoid manipulation, domination or control
- Listen to God's voice within
- Welcome communication in both languages
- Embrace cultural differences

E. 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.

Skills:

- Analyze text, understand points of view, appreciate beauty, use technology effectively, create, integrate and apply information for effective communication

Strategies:

- Express oneself through the effective use of technology
- Use critical thinking skills to make sense of information
- Develop personal voice and a point of view
- Nurture an appreciation of the arts
- Inquire, question and reflect on text
- Create a quality of life that promotes one's well-being.⁷

The effective communicator creates meaning from information and ideas and can share it successfully with others through speaking, writing and presenting. Meaning making is very much a reflective process. This involves students making connections between their lives and the stories of Jesus' life. In order to be effective communicators, students need to think critically, recognize points of view, let their curiosity motivate them to question, assess, then evaluate the flurry of information that permeates their world daily. Students faith is deepened by creating and communicating connections between themselves, their daily experiences, the life of Jesus and the gospel stories.

The Thinking Framework and An Effective Communicator

The "Effective Communicator" thinking framework below offers ways to deepen student's understanding of how the life and actions of Jesus provide guidance for the different types of communication students use in their daily lives. Communicating authentically, sensitively and critically through the layered components of faith and life is essential to being an effective communicator.

Thinking Framework and An Effective Communicator	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	Is open to diversity and respects everyone in words and actions.	Makes Jesus' story their own and integrates it into their communications with others.	Shares ideas honestly with sensitivity to others.	Draws deeply and in life-giving ways from their family and community history.	Giving voice to causes that enhance the quality of life.
Educator	Sows the seeds of reflection and encourages learners to think for themselves.	Embraces Jesus' values and models them with colleagues and students.	Appreciates, questions and imagines the possibilities that Jesus' teachings provide.	Seeks the wisdom and new possibilities for the school community.	Awakens students to make a difference and actively engage in their world.
Catholic School Leaders	Invite staff and students to choices and commitments that enhance their relationship with God.	Welcome diversity, practices inclusivity and offers hospitality to all	Create conversation and welcomes other contributions	Nurture own and others' character with respect, responsibility and reverence.	Help to build the school community — both human and religious.

The Role of Prayer in Effective Communication

Prayer is an act of communication with God. It is a time that is devoted to developing one's relationship with the Creator. Regular prayer connects us to God's love and deepens our relationship with Him. When we pray, we reflect, think about others, problem solve, express thanks, appreciate God's love and support and embrace a sense of wonder. When we effectively communicate with God, we acknowledge God's goodness and presence in our lives. Prayer helps us find strength in knowing that Jesus is always at our side, accompanying us in a world that sometimes appears to be hopeless. Prayer transforms our way of thinking and nurtures our spirituality. "Any teacher who encourages students to be self-reflective in their hearts, to listen to their depths, to have a sense of awe and reverence about the world around them, to live with gratitude, to avoid becoming one's own 'god,' to

have a feeling of interdependence and belonging to a whole universe with co-responsibility for its well-being engages and nurtures students as 'pray-ers'."⁸

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. Jesus is the ultimate communicator and from His life students learn how to interact interculturally and live with people from diverse backgrounds. In the gospels, His communications reveal attitudes, values and actions necessary to build positive, respectful relationships. Effective communication is part of becoming who students are meant to be: persons of dignity and freedom, created in the image and likeness of God, communicating with others as modelled by Jesus Christ.



“When people talk to one another, they listen to what others think and they speak about what they understand and believe. Minds and hearts are opened – the world is made a better place.”

– Bishop Douglas Crosby, OMI

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Ontario Institute for Catholic Education
 44 Hunt Street, Suite 2F
 Hamilton, Ontario, L8R 3R1
 Tel: 905-523-2469 | E-mail: office@iceont.ca