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A Curriculum for the Heart of Young People: Self-Directed, Responsible, Lifelong Learner

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This fifth monograph in the series, “A Curriculum for the Heart of Young People”, focuses on how the graduate expectation, “A Self-Directed, Responsible, Lifelong Learner” is foundational for Catholic curriculum.

A Self-Directed, Responsible, Lifelong Learner

“Wisdom is the realization of knowledge in life giving ways. Becoming wise goes beyond reason, it engages the whole person — head (knowing), heart (feeling), and hands (doing). The self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner “uses all of their human capacities to personally understand their lives and traditions; to discern what is true and false; good and evil, beautiful and ugly; to weigh what should be done and avoided and why; to consciously make responsible decisions.”¹

The Self-Directed Learner (Knowing)

A self-directed learner uses their God given talents to make the world a better place. They are self-aware, recognize their own learning interests and consciously pursue the acquisition of knowledge in a way that allows them to positively contribute to the common good. Whether they are originating knowledge for themselves or inheriting the legacy of tradition through the humanities, sciences, and arts, they reinvent it and make it their own.

The Responsible Learner (Feeling)

A responsible learner questions their own ideas for biases and is willing to share with, listen to and be informed by perspectives different from their own. Being a responsible learner comes with a commitment to take action and help others and for Catholic students, this action manifests itself in

conscious choices and deliberate decisions about the direction and quality of their God-given life and service to others.

The Lifelong Learner (Doing)

A lifelong learner is committed to continuous learning, improvement and innovation. Inherently curious they use their imagination to seek new solutions and have an unrelenting interest in the limitless horizons of life. A lifelong learner constantly adapts and strives to improve their learning. “They want to know all that can be known, to understand what they know, so that they can act with wisdom and just discernment.”²

Catholic Curriculum

Catholic curriculum is designed to support students in understanding, articulating and critiquing what

they learn. A worldview grounded in faith guides the learner to develop a personal relationship with Jesus who “intentionally pursued actions that were personally and socially meaningful.”³ Catholic schools provide opportunities for students to pursue actions that engage each one of them to care deeply for what is right and to be responsible for the well-being of self and others. Offering opportunities for students to actively and passionately engage in local and global issues helps students lead lives that matter. Catholic curriculum empowers students to be self-directed and take responsibility to help others and transform their community.



The Learners We Need

The learners we need to shape our futures will thrive when they are self-motivated and self-directed. The person who learns by doing, who learns by thinking, who learns by experience is a valuable member of the community. The person who has a curiosity, a willingness to question the status quo, and to want to know more about his or her role in the community is a lifelong learner. Lifelong learning is a challenge to our ingenuity and our versatility. It is our hope for a better world and for self-fulfillment for more people. Learners in Catholic schools rise to meet both great and small challenges.

A Self-Directed Responsible Lifelong Learner	Classroom Connections	The Learners We Need
a) Demonstrates a confident and positive sense of self and respect for the dignity and welfare of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer and Liturgies • Self-awareness activities • Collaboration skills • Student voice • Social Justice Teachings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen with understanding and empathy. • Check in on the thinking of others. • Lead justice for all.
b) Demonstrates flexibility and adaptability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-regulation skills • Virtues • Skills of resilience • Growth Mindset • Managing complexity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persist to find alternatives. • Reflect and respond, rather than react. • Adjust their thinking along the way.
c) Takes initiative and demonstrates Christian leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive influence • Leading by example • Student choice • Gifts of the Holy Spirit • Service to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energize others with new ideas and optimism. • Presume positive intention of group members. • Engage in works of peace, kindness and justice.

A Self-Directed Responsible Lifelong Learner	Classroom Connections	The Learners We Need
d) Responds to, manages and constructively influences change in a discerning manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change strategies • Shared understandings • Common language • Christian Meditation • Perseverance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinguish fact from interpretation. • Understand opportunities for improvement, innovation and creativity. • Pose deep questions to engage thinking.
e) Sets appropriate goals and priorities in school, work and personal life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-directed learning • Goal setting • Jesus as role model • Emotional Intelligence • Social skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn with purpose and passion. • Know what they're doing and what it takes to get there. • Make clear decisions about the best way to further their goals.
f) Applies effective communication, decision-making, problem-solving, time and resource management skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication • Lives of the Saints • Inquiry Habit of Mind • Evaluating information • Active listening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate effectively in a variety of styles. • Demonstrate social, emotional and intercultural skills. • Actively pursue different perspectives and fresh insights.
g) Examines and reflects on one's personal values, abilities and aspirations influencing life's choices and opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life as gift • Moral imperative • Entrepreneurial Skills • Sense-making • Church teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect personally and socially on their practice. • Are willing to acknowledge and learn from mistakes. • Make choices informed by their faith.
h) Participates in leisure and fitness activities for a balanced and healthy lifestyle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity/emotional safety • Student well-being • Conflict management • Making healthy choices • Respect for sacredness of the body. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in living life with head, heart and hands. • Develop skills that contribute to lifelong health and well-being. • Understand how to protect their own and others' health.

The Self-Directed Learning Journey

Every journey has a destination. In a similar way, the learning journey, when personalized, provides each student with the opportunity to set their own goals, monitor their progress and seek feedback on their learning. Giving students the right tools ensures that they will benefit from both the journey they travel and the final destination they reach. Self-directed learning is personalized, student centred and built around the individual's curiosity and interests. Understanding what tools learners need to reach their learning destination is key. A learner benefits

from a knowledgeable teacher who understands the curriculum and uses effective pedagogy, recognizing possible obstacles, and hidden treasures that shouldn't be missed. The learner needs their own tools, including a map and compass that provide a comprehensive picture of the journey, and a way to figure out where they are now in relation to where they want to go. In Catholic schools this journey is guided by faith and grounded in community. This grounding helps students make meaning of their lives and shapes them to grow in understanding that God loves them and is always at their side.

The Thinking Framework and “A Self-Directed, Responsible, Lifelong Learner”

Like Jesus, the self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner has the courage to ask the question, ‘why is there suffering in the world?’ Grounded in love and compassion, the learner challenges the status quo to overcome the causes of suffering and take action for

a more just world. Confident about their own creativity and seeing learning as a lifelong adventure, the learner takes risks to solve problems for the common good. The framework below offers possibilities for school communities to consider when preparing students to be self-directed, responsible, lifelong learners.

Thinking Framework and The Discerning Believer	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	Takes risks and sees learning as a lifelong adventure.	Asks about the causes of suffering and how to overcome them.	Recognizes that innovation and creativity are in their DNA.	Is grounded in love and contemplative compassion.	Has the courage to ask the question, “why is there suffering”? and takes action.
Educator	Establishes deep learning tasks that create and use knowledge.	Creates a trusting classroom so that the soul will show up.	Promotes thinking skills within the curriculum.	Teaches that a mistake is only a mistake if you don’t learn from it.	Sorts out what works best for student engagement and learning.
Catholic School Leaders	Act with wisdom based on careful and just discernment.	Understand what is needed to implement change and works with all to build trust teachings and values.	Respect and coordinates everyone’s work to maximize impact.	Have the courage to be compassionate and ask the critical questions.	Encourage educators and students to dream and then challenges them to act.

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. Living in the 21st century requires students to be self-directed, responsible, lifelong learners. In Catholic schools these competencies manifest themselves throughout the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations. Foundational to living in the world today, is the ability to take initiative, set direction and build knowledge for one’s own learning. The learner needs to be confident about their gifts and talents and use their gifts and talents to respect the

dignity and equality of each person. In a society that technically markets everything, it is important that the life-long learner be able to self-reflect, process and interpret information to create meaning that gets to the truth and advances the common good. In a world where truth is challenging to discern, the learner must responsibly engage in daily living, confident that the truth sets people free and that Jesus is always at their side.

Resources

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Monograph Series — A Curriculum for the Heart of Young People

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