



Students from Attawapiscat and Holy Spirit at the Ontario Legislature

We Are All Interconnected

Nunavut/Aboriginal Initiative

By **Patrick Keyes**, Principal, Holy Spirit, Toronto CDSB

In response to several programs initiated by the Honourable James Bartleman, former lieutenant-governor of Ontario, the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) embarked on a series of projects in the fall of 2005 to cultivate understanding, dialogue and support with First Nations and the Canadian North. The TCDSB recognizes the unique role that First Nations' people have in weaving the fabric of our country.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to promote partnerships between Toronto Catholic schools and Nunavut schools and First Nations' communities that enhance cultural understanding, increase student literacy and cultivate appreciation and reverence for the Earth. These partnerships provide learning opportunities through fundraising, sharing of resources and professional development opportunities, through ongoing staff and student communication and exchange programs.

Our program goals are to:

- provide staff and students in Toronto Catholic schools with a greater understanding and increased sensitivity towards issues concerning the Aboriginal peoples of Canada;
- help Toronto teachers develop best instructional practices in order to incorporate authentic and accurate perspectives, experiences and histories of Aboriginal peoples across the curriculum;

- assist Nunavut and First Nations' schools to obtain desired resources based on specific classroom needs;
- increase the literacy skills of Toronto and Nunavut students by providing them with real-life technological and writing opportunities;
- familiarize urban students with life in remote, rural settings to increase their understanding of and to foster national pride in Canada's cultural and geographical diversity;
- reduce the marginalization of Aboriginal youth;
- reduce the isolation of Nunavut and First Nations' students by providing them with opportunities to communicate with TCDSB students through letter-writing, teleconferencing and videoconferencing;
- provide students with opportunities for increased involvement in positive community initiatives such as fundraising and cultural exchanges; and
- provide opportunities for staff professional development.

One of the guiding principles of this project was a commitment to long-term sustainability. Partnerships that are established between participating schools should be sustained in subsequent years and can be expanded as relationships evolve (e.g. cultural exchanges). Ongoing communication, characterized by active listening and open discussion, will assist schools in creating reciprocal partnerships in which the needs of all participants are recognized and met.

Tendrils

This project began with the aim of twinning TCDSB schools with those in the Arctic. Through twinning, some fine relationships between students in the South and those in the North have developed. This exchange has taken the form of letter writing, teleconferencing, email exchanges, story writing and the sharing of artwork. In 2006-07 Bishop Allen Catholic Academy in Etobicoke hosted an exchange with students from Rankin Inlet in Nunavut. St. Frances De Sales Catholic Elementary School in North York hosted students from Mattigami (North Central Ontario) and Holy Spirit Catholic Elementary School in Scarborough hosted students from Attawapiscat (James Bay).

This project has now developed many tendrils that are all at different stages of growth, largely due to the enthusiasm of a wide number of students and educators from both the North and South, as well as our many partners in the project.

The following projects are active for 2007-08:

- TCDSB schools will be twinned with First Nation communities.
- The Story-Writing Project: Elementary students will write and illustrate stories based on the oral traditions of the North.
- Exchange Programs: With our partner SEVEC (Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges in Canada), we hope to offer student exchanges between communities in the North and South.
- Arctic Games 2008: We aim to hold the games at six sites in the TCDSB.



For the past three years, the TCDSB has hosted the Arctic Games where elementary students, led by high school student-leaders and Inuit college students from the *Nunavut Sivuniksavut* program at Algonquin College participate in a day of celebration of the Inuit culture through interactive Arctic Games. The Arctic Games include dance, throat singing and the playing of traditional winter games. Last year over forty schools participated in the event, which was held at four locations, Michael Power/St Joseph CSS, Bishop Morocco Merton CSS, John Paul II CSS and Brebeuf College School.

In 2006-07 with the support of the TCDSB Science Resource Department and in concert with the Toronto Zoo, a winter walking project was developed. Students in our junior grades learn about mammals and birds of the Arctic and to appreciate the sensitive northern environment.

For the past two years, Inuit college students have toured our school system teaching TCDSB students about the traditional Inuit life, reverence for the earth and awakening students to the fragility of the Arctic environment. In response to what they have learned, schools are becoming eco-schools.

The TCDSB has also hosted a number of workshops for educators on First Nations' visual art, drumming and dance. We are particularly grateful to the McMichael Gallery and visual artist Linda MacKay for their support in this venture.

- Drumming/Dance Project: This is an outreach program where students learn to make drums, and then learn to drum and dance.
- Mattigami Literacy Camp Project: In the fall of 2006, teachers from St. Frances De Sales visited Mattagami and in July 2007 they offered a two-week literacy camp in Mattigami.
- The Crate Exchange: Students from TCDSB high schools exchange art with students in the North. Art is sent in a crate that opens into a display case. The receiving school then keeps some of the art and replaces it with art they have created and the crate is sent back. The culminating event is to

have the artwork exhibited at the McMichael Gallery.

- Eco-Schools: In response to learning about the sensitivity of the North to climate change, schools in the TCDSB are becoming eco-schools.
- Aboriginal Framework: In January 2007 the Ministry of Education's Aboriginal office published a framework for engaging Aboriginal Peoples. The TCDSB is exploring how to implement the framework in an urban environment. In partnership with local Aboriginal groups, we look forward to developing an outreach program.
- Nunavut Sivuniksavut: This is a group of Inuit college students, who shared their knowledge while touring our school system for the last two years. We look forward to their visit this school year.
- Aboriginal Studies: Mary Ward High School is piloting an Aboriginal Studies Quest independent study credit for high school students.

- First Nations Resource Website: This website will offer links to many different on-line resources relating to First Nations' peoples. The resources are linked according to division – primary, junior, intermediate and senior. This resource will give both educators and students the opportunity for self-directed learning.
- Student Leadership Symposium on Aboriginal Challenges: This will be held at the University of Toronto, St Michael's College hosted by Brebeuf College School on December 14, 2007.
- TCDSB Teacher Symposium on Aboriginal Education: This is planned for the spring of 2008.
- Students from throughout the TCDSB are working on the topic of climate change in the North and South. Students from several TCDSB schools will participate in artist-lead workshops beginning in January. Their work will be exhibited at the Ontario Science Centre, where the World Science Conference on *Climate Change* will be held in June 2008.

Summary

This project has been enriching for all concerned. Our Catholic faith tradition calls us to act justly, to love kindly and to walk humbly with our God. At a time in our global history when there is a growing consensus about the fragility of our world, there is much to learn from the Aboriginal

Peoples with respect to reverence for the Earth and our inter-connectivity to each other.

For further information, contact Patrick Keyes at patrick.keyes@tcdsb.org.

Merry Christmas

*We wish you the peace, joy and blessings
of that first Christmas morning.
May it sustain you throughout the coming year.*

*Wishing you and your family
a most holy Christmas and a blessed New Year.*

The Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario

CPCO Christmas Hours

The CPCO office will be closed for the Christmas holidays, commencing Monday, December 24, 2007 and will reopen on Monday, January 7, 2008.

Voice and e-mail messages sent over the holidays will be returned on January 7, 2008.

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