



A Professional Faith-based Collective

The Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative

When the Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative (EOCCC) was formed 15 years ago, the World Wide Web was four years old and Amazon was a large river in South America. The technology that now links us so seamlessly was in its infancy. In Eastern Ontario, teachers were scattered in pockets of urban centres or small, country schools with as few as two or three colleagues on site. Catholic educators yearned for a network that would allow them to share resources, cultivate new ideas and build on their existing strengths.

The concept of Catholic curriculum cooperatives sprang from this need for a professional, faith-based collective and the conviction that the group could achieve more by working together than any member could accomplish on an individual basis. We wanted to engage as a Catholic community, to maximize our effectiveness as a school system rooted in spirituality.

MISSION

The mission developed by this emerging collective was simple and straightforward:

The Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative is committed to sharing of human and physical resources required for the delivery of curriculum review, development and implementation services and in-service education among the Catholic school boards of Eastern Ontario.

In other words, our purpose is to help teachers develop and deliver solid materials created for our Catholic classrooms.

GOALS

Our goals, in fact, go much farther than that single mandate, setting out in detail seven key aspects that flow from a primary shared goal:

To provide Eastern Ontario Catholic schools with well-developed Catholic curriculum documents and support materials which meet Ministry of Education requirements, while reflecting the beliefs and values of the Catholic faith community.

Our activities, responses and interactions with our partners need to be animated through the person of Jesus Christ. The seven key aspects are to:

- respond to local and provincial initiatives and directions within the context of our mission in Catholic education;
- assist member boards to provide high quality in-service education;

- provide member boards with the means through a sharing process to develop the knowledge and talents of their Catholic teachers in the areas of curriculum review, development and implementation;
- support member boards to implement *Catholicity Across the Curriculum*;
- provide member boards with a cost-effective method of reviewing, developing and implementing curriculum;
- provide the Ministry of Education, the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario and other related groups with efficient mechanisms for interacting with a large number of partners; and
- provide a vehicle to foster a collaborative process at the provincial, regional and local levels.

It is an ambitious and comprehensive set of goals. How does it play out in practice? A quick review of the past 15 years provides clear evidence that we have remained true to our initial intent. The productive network we enjoy today is built on commitment, community building and contribution.

COMMITMENT

The Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative springs from a common commitment to the values of Catholic education. As Catholic educators, we have our mission to foster education as a life-long experience leading us forth from where we are to where God would have us be, in the example of Jesus. We ask God to help us to deepen our knowledge and understanding, our awareness and sensitivity, and our discipleship in serving others in God's name. This is our common commitment. The importance of this work in the current era of secularism is clear. Catholic curriculum and living our faith are the critical legacies we can provide future generations. We need to stand strong together to preserve our Catholic identity. Clearly, educators throughout Eastern Ontario have made a commitment of heart and faith to their professional calling. They are living out this commitment in a variety of ways, not the least of which is in their contributions to the Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Over the past 15 years, existing connections have been reinforced and new links have been forged between the school boards that participate in the Cooperative and the individual educators who work for those school boards.

Exciting partnerships have developed involving the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board, the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, the Ottawa Catholic School Board and the Renfrew County Catholic District School Board. We have presented unified messages and acted as a strong voice for Eastern Ontario at various forums, within the Ontario Ministry of Education. We have worked with the other Catholic curriculum cooperatives of Ontario (the Catholic Curriculum Corporation and the Northern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative), as well as the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario to further the interest of Catholic education throughout our region. We have developed a strong community that continues to reach to new distances and have influence with new audiences.

CONTRIBUTION

The EOCCC has been the recipient of invaluable contributions of time, expertise and dedication. Writing teams have tackled summer projects. Teachers have provided feedback and new ideas. Principals and members of the senior administration teams have provided support and encouragement. School board trustees, priests, bishops and others have supported us financially and spiritually. The results speak for themselves in the contributions that the EOCCC has been able to return to the Eastern Ontario educational community and beyond.

The EOCCC website at www.eoccc.org has become a virtual community of Catholic educators. Among the materials that have been produced are:

- *Lesson Plans for Literacy – Linking PM Benchmarks to Classroom Strategies*;
- *Boys' Literacy Strategies*;
- *Lesson Plans for Literacy – Linking CASI to Classroom Strategies*;
- *Restorative Justice* resources;
- *Catholic Curriculum Frameworks*;
- the *Respect for God's Creation* package focusing on environmental sustainability;
- *Affirming Catholic Themes* mentor texts to enrich student writing; and
- coordination of the member boards' aboriginal self-identification policies and aboriginal educational resources.

ONE RECENT EXAMPLE: *Our Language, Our Story*

The EOCCC's guide to character education, *Our Language, Our Story* was released through the cooperative in June 2009 and officially launched province-wide in October. This comprehensive new resource will enrich and enliven teachers' commitment to Catholic character development.

Rooted in the theological and cardinal virtues, *Our Language, Our Story* provides practical tools and clear strategies to help build the character of students in the model of Christ. Available online through the EOCCC website and in CD format, the comprehensive resource package will guide teachers of grades 1 through 8 in teaching through the lens of the Catholic virtues.

All of the resource material is based on the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love, and the four cardinal virtues of prudence (good sense), justice (seeking the good), temperance (moderation) and fortitude (courage). *Our Language, Our Story* is divided into six main sections beginning with *Curriculum Connections* that provide direct links between the virtues and lesson plans. Another section, *Virtues and Themes*, offers information on the theological and cardinal virtues and on the Catholic themes of community, compassion, discipleship, reverence, solidarity and stewardship. The material here includes Scripture quotes, related concepts and links to online resources.

Other sections include samples of community outreach activities, school activities that focus on prayer and liturgical resources, and staff development including adult faith resources, prayer services, blessings for a variety of occasions and program-related resources.

THE FUTURE

In many ways, technology has caught up with our ideals over the past 15 years. The World Wide Web that was so new when the EOCCC was born is now an essential tool that each of us uses on a daily basis. It provides a network that can link together like-minded people, expose us to new ideas and enable us to collaborate in new and exciting ways.

With such a basic capability at our fingertips, is a curriculum cooperative still relevant in today's world? The answer is that we have never been more relevant. The Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative gives us a focused forum to develop relevant curriculum specifically for Catholic schools. In a secular world, Catholic education stands apart. The Christ figure at the heart of our education system makes it so. That very Christ figure shapes the growing bank of materials being developed through Catholic curriculum cooperatives such as ours in Eastern Ontario.

The future of Catholic education is being publicly debated and questioned on a regular basis. The strength of the materials we produce, the power of the networks we create and the clarity of our focus in Christ provides our resounding response to those questions.

This is why we are here, as expressed by St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

The products of our Catholic curriculum cooperatives can be measured in the content available on our websites, in the materials we produce and distribute, and in the way those materials are put to use.

However, we are doing ourselves a disservice if we depend solely on such measurable outputs to evaluate our work. The true value of our cooperative is found in the benefits we cannot measure; the commitment, the community and the contributions we build together when we are one in spirit and purpose.