

Developing Critical Thinking and Literacy Skills Through Media Using Catholic Themes for the Junior Division

Board website: www.niagararc.com

About the project ...

The *Developing Critical Thinking and Literacy Skills Through Media Using Catholic Themes for the Junior Division* project was developed to teach Catholic students to think critically through the lens of their faith about the ways that technology and media are both used and misused. The project had two key components – the media kit resources and supporting lessons. The resources in the kit were selected to help all elementary teachers develop a better awareness of media mindfulness and give them access to current resources. Kits with books, DVDs and posters were distributed to all elementary schools in the board and additional materials were purchased for sharing from the Board's Catholic Resource Centre. Critical thinking and student voice are the key themes of both the kit resources and the supporting lessons that were created specifically for the junior division. The lessons illustrate how Catholic themes identified in the Catholic Curriculum Corporation's *Catholic Curriculum Maps* and reflected in Ontario Curriculum expectations can be integrated into literacy and religion and family life programs. The resources and lessons were developed and reviewed by teams of teachers and piloted in a Grade 6 classroom. In addition, approximately 500 K–8 students were introduced to selected resources and lessons. Feedback from these students and their teachers informed the final content of the resource kit and lessons.

Impact on student learning and school culture ...

- Students involved in the Grade 6 pilot were very engaged in the creation of profiles for their individual choices of people who, in their opinion, exemplify commitment. The high quality of their work reflected their improved understanding of concepts and resulted in corresponding improvements in their achievement levels.
- The use of a variety of media resources – audio, visual, audio-visual, print and electronic – for classroom instruction was a creative way to address the goals of several ministry policies and frameworks related to inclusive education, environmental education, First Nations, Inuit and Métis Policy and safe schools, and led to increased student involvement and success.

Lessons learned for moving forward ...

- Explicit teaching and purposeful dialogue is needed to support teachers in embedding specific Catholic themes and related virtues in the curriculum. This awareness emphasizes the importance of the board's continuing support for teachers working together in professional learning communities. The Board Improvement Plan will include this focus and continue to provide networking opportunities for teachers.
- The junior lessons can become models for Catholic Professional Learning Communities to develop similar lessons and learning tasks for primary and intermediate divisions.
- Teacher workshops will continue to be offered at a Fall Professional Development Day, at after-school workshops and at the provincial *When Faith Meets Pedagogy* conference. Consideration will also be given to offering workshops on *Media Literacy Through the Lens of Catholic Faith* to parent communities.