

ONLINE PEDAGOGY

Catholic Virtual Learning Resource



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THE BEATITUDES

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

(Matthew 5:1-12)



“Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.”

— St. Catherine of Sienna

A SHARED WORLDVIEW

As teachers in Catholic schools, we share a unique worldview grounded in service and community. Through our professional practice, guiding students with our hearts and minds, the broader community, both present and future, also benefits. The learners we empower will eventually contribute to society through their own endeavours, continuing a pattern of flourishing and love.



A SHARED COMMITMENT

Regardless of the specific role we have in education at any given time, we are all educational leaders. Educating youth unites responsibility with service, a transformative element of our vocation. In fact, teaching is a profession that fosters all others, motivating students to apply learning meaningfully as life-long, engaged and contributing citizens.

Grounded in Gospel values, Catholic education nurtures an inclusive learning culture of high expectations for all learners across all learning environments. Diversity is championed as a strength, so that students with different backgrounds and experiences are collectively inspired to achieve to their unique potential and promote the common good. Created in God's image, all learners matter.

*“Word and silence, parable and image
become authentic pedagogical methods for
revealing the mystery of Christ's love.”
- Directory for Catechesis, 159.*



A season appears to be opening in which [education] can become representative of interests so as to design pathways to faith that are less standardized and ever more attentive to the uniqueness of each person.
— *Directory for Catechesis*, §370.

BLESSED WITH OPPORTUNITY

Education experts believe that technology provides an opportunity to enact positive change for students, stimulating deep learning and empowering students to become “change makers.”¹ While digital tools provide the ‘what’ that impacts learning, teachers are among the education professionals providing the ‘who’ as well as the ‘how’ of this trajectory. We ensure that students engage in robust applications of their knowledge and understanding in ways that are truly motivating and meaningful.

Technology is a tool, not a learning outcome. Used to its full potential, technology deepens pedagogy when it inspires big ideas, thoughtful conversations, open-ended questions and solves complex problems. This care-filled approach is one that stewards the dignity of the learner and fosters an encounter with our Creator God who designs each for discovery, wonder and awe.

WE BELIEVE

Because technology is a powerful tool, we look to *Learning for All, K-12*, for guidance on how best to draw from its potential to have the greatest positive impact on student learning. The central beliefs from *Learning for All, K-12*, combined with our Catholic worldview, form the lens from which we view our students, shaping our moral imperative to respond to the whole child. These beliefs state that:

- All students can succeed,
- Each student has a unique pattern of learning,
- Successful instructional practices are research-informed and strengthened by experience,
- Universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected approaches for meeting the needs of all students,
- Teachers are the key educators for a student’s literacy and numeracy development,
- Teachers need the support of the broader community to create learning environments supporting all students,
- Fairness is not sameness.

Students learn best when instruction, resources and the learning environment are specifically suited to their strengths, needs and interests, honoured through personalization and precision. Personalization involves tailoring instructional strategies according to learning and engagement needs. Precision ensures that students across all abilities and learning needs engage with learning from a variety of entry points. Collectively, these practices celebrate the uniqueness of God’s creation in fellowship as a Catholic learning community.



"God is present everywhere, and every person is His work."
— St. Francis de Sales

The principles of *Learning for All, K-12* connect naturally to several Catholic Social Teaching principles, the core of our rich Catholic social tradition:

- the inherent dignity of the human person, as created in the image and likeness of God
- creation is intensely diverse, and we are called to nurture those differences
- the common good of others, and the good of the whole human family
- solidarity to think and act communally, working in relationship with others
- ensuring the participation of all in a community and therefore contributing to the progress of society

As Catholic educators, we believe firmly that all students belong, and we can demonstrate this belief through instructional approaches that include Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction.

WE RESPOND: HUMAN-CENTRED UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN THE VIRTUAL LEARNING CONTEXT

What we have in common makes us human. *Learning for All, K-12* describes Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a "teaching approach that focuses on using teaching strategies or pedagogical materials designed to meet special needs to enhance learning for all students, regardless of age, skills or situation."² Universal Design therefore provides curriculum access to all students through teaching strategies and a learning environment that are accessible to different learners. As a human-centred process, it starts by understanding the motivators and needs of an education community and subsequently infusing creativity, collaboration, empathy and divergent thinking skills into the environment in which that process live.

The broad learning principles of Universal Design include:

- **Equitable use** – universality and equity through instruction extending learning for all students and providing multiple opportunities for learners to reach their potential
- **Appropriately designed space** – a welcoming and engaging environment with readily accessible and interactive learning materials and communication methods
- **Flexibility** – instructional strategies and materials that are relevant and motivating, in a variety of modalities, with embedded options that amplify student choice and voice and allow for adjustments responding to student input
- **Simplicity** – a clear, organized and intuitive learning space designed to encourage access, providing information and answers that accommodate all learners
- **Safety** – a learning environment that models, encourages and nurtures the collaboration and well-being of learners so they feel connected, respected, are willing to take learning risks and are motivated to achieve to their full potential
- **Different modes of perception** – honouring and supporting student strengths and needs by providing a variety of teaching and learning modalities such as audio and visual material and multi-media, providing entry points into learning and applications for all students



“We must seek to listen with faith and humility as we ask the question: How is the Spirit calling us to respond individually and communally to our present context?” — *Renewing the Promise*

CELEBRATING HUMAN CREATIVITY AND INGENUITY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Blessed with God-given gifts and talents, humans have a duty to stewardship, applying the skills received through God’s grace for the good of all. The human ingenuity that created technology now shapes education. Considered “the enabler, the accelerator, the deepener” of impactful pedagogy, technology can provide the means for thoughtful and effective strategies responding to these principles in the virtual learning environment.³ The table below illustrates how the virtual learning space provides unique opportunities for the Catholic teaching and learning community, including deep connections to the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations. When the principles of UDL are applied to online learning with intention, the space inspires community members to encounter one another genuinely, contributing to rich cognitive, emotional and spiritual growth, and authentic human formation.

Universal Design for Learning Principle	Virtual Learning Context Practices
Equitable use	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instruction, information and materials are provided in both synchronous and asynchronous modes that incorporates a range of digital materials.• Content delivery and related materials respect different internet bandwidths (e.g., pdfs, slideshows, audio transcripts).• Virtual tour of the learning platform demonstrating functionality and tools is provided.• Students are invited to complete a survey to determine digital competencies and inform decisions about the learning space.• Rotating note-taking roles are assigned during synchronous learning and notes are posted for additions and comments, supplemented by recorded audio and video to offer format choices.
Appropriately designed space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co-created Catholic Learning Community Agreement establishes clear expectations and learning community norms.• Post and review the Institute for Catholic Education’s (ICE) Responsible Digital Citizenship reflection poster (Appendix 1).• Clear expectations for completing tasks, submitting assignments, assessment and evaluation practices are posted that incorporate student input and flexibility.• Scaffolding tools (e.g., outlines, infographics) bridge learning.• Central online learning space and associated materials are engaging, accessible and logically organized for all Catholic learning community members.

Flexibility

- Student-teacher feedback loops amplify student voice and choice by incorporating preferences into activities and tasks.
- Embedded predictability and reassurance through timely messages about assignments.
- Co-created rubrics.
- Choice of collaborative group members.
- Choice in how knowledge, understanding and application of learning are demonstrated different assessment and evaluation options.
- Options for submitting tasks, such as alternate due dates and submitting assignments in increments.

Simplicity

- Information and tools postings are consistent with their importance.
- Materials and information are organized with clear headings.
- Clear and consistent layouts and organization for sharing content.
- Hyperlinks consist of descriptive wording (e.g., 'Student-Teacher Check-in Schedule' rather than 'click here').
- Information is streamlined and content is collated in a consistent structure.
- Different literacy skills are accommodated across the environment.
- Prompting and messaging occurs both during and after instruction as circumstances require.

Safety

- Tool for regular teacher-student communication is provided, such as a spreadsheet. timeslot sign-up.
- Initiate feedback loops that involve students offering feedback on course content and asking clarifying questions, for example, to stimulate self-reflection and the mutual exchange of insights and information.
- A safe space supports taking risk-taking, such as assuming greater autonomy for learning.
- Diverse opinions are encouraged and honoured.
- Students are invited to post their needs or petitions for themselves or that which burdens them, and the class is encouraged to pray for those needs weekly.

Different modes
of perception

- Synchronous and asynchronous instruction and communication.
- Content delivery and related materials occur in a variety of modalities (e.g., slideshows, audio, video, pdf, infographic, digital texts, podcast).
- Use of video conferencing, discussion boards, and backchannel discussions.
- Regular communication with students in multiple formats.
- Variety and choice are embedded into activities, assignments and products (e.g., verbal, visual, tactile, auditory, demonstration, language, symbols)



“Educators are called to be open and professionally knowledgeable when they are leading classes where diversity is recognized, accepted and appreciated as an educational asset that is beneficial to everyone.”
— *Congregation for Catholic Education, § 5*

UDL incorporates the span and variety of teaching components:

- Overall and specific expectations, learning goals
- Teaching and learning strategies and contexts
- Pedagogical materials and formats
- Technology
- A variety of student products arising from learning
- Assessment and evaluation

When teaching components are designed to anticipate a variety of needs, prioritize access and respect human diversity, the full Catholic teaching and learning community benefits. A welcoming, barrier-free virtual learning environment naturally empowers students to engage with and assume ownership of their education. When they learn and apply knowledge and skills in a meaningful way, they experience and benefit from rewards well beyond the conclusion of a course. This process reflects the divine pedagogy of God, attending to the unique needs of learners. A holistic experience of education that prioritizes the needs of body, mind and spirit creates space for learners to encounter the Sacred, and invites questions that expose young people to the graces of the Spirit.

WE RESPOND: STUDENT-CENTRED DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN THE VIRTUAL LEARNING CONTEXT

How we differ makes us individuals.⁴ *Learning for All, K-12* describes differentiated instruction (DI) as a “method of teaching that attempts to adapt instruction to suit the different interests, learning styles, and readiness to learn of individual students.”⁵ Note that DI differs from what may be called ‘individualized instruction,’ suggesting customized lessons or assignments for each student.⁶ DI centres on meaningful learning that responds to diversity rather than uniformity, personalization rather than conformity. Whereas UDL provides multiple options across the learning environment, DI drills down further by tailoring content or tasks based on student interests, preferences, strengths and needs.

Three research-informed concepts highlight the importance of DI:

1. A safe, welcoming and supporting learning environment encourages learning.
2. Learners thrive on appropriate challenge through learning that is neither too difficult nor too easy.
3. Learners must make meaning of their learning through connections to previous knowledge and experience.



“In this way, by learning from one another, we can better reflect that wonderful multifaceted reality that Christ’s Church is meant to be.”
— *Christus Vivit*, § 207

FAIRNESS IS NOT SAMENESS

Catholic community formation is highly personal, encouraging genuine human encounters. Teachers witness the unique qualities of their students and honour their potential by adapting instruction to respond to these qualities. Any, or all, of the following elements may be differentiated according to the variety of characteristics students demonstrate:

- **Content:** what students learn and when the learning will occur; how the curriculum is accessed
- **Process:** the types of activities and tasks students engage with and how they are sequenced
- **Product:** how students demonstrate their learning
- **Environment:** the context and environment in which students learn and demonstrate learning; how learning is structured

Technology offers tremendous opportunities for differentiating instruction in the virtual learning environment. Since students are largely familiar with technological tools, this familiarity motivates and provides an initial sense of security from the outset of learning online. For such positive elements to endure with students, learning must be seen as relevant and empowering, leading to exciting discoveries and connections that expand their world. In other words, learning is simultaneously teacher-constructed and student-led. These experiential moments are supportive of the full development of the student, awakening meaning and value for oneself and for the world within the Catholic context. Students who are empowered to be active agents in their learning environments develop strategies to nurture their capacity as Catholic leaders who make a difference in the name of the Lord.

Differentiating instruction in the virtual context is successful when students believe that instruction places its greatest attention on them through technology, rather than on the technology as the medium of delivery, illustrated in the following examples.



UDL and DI in the virtual learning environment:
Use Appendix 2 to reflect on UDL and DI as it applies to next steps in your professional practice.

Content



- Procedures, routines and learning agreements in place from the outset
- Interest surveys and other pre-assessment qualitative data informs personalized, relevant and engaging learning
- Learner choice and voice embedded across instruction through topic options and menus (e.g., varied options for research, independent study)
- Learning materials shared in different formats (e.g., graphics, taped demonstration)
- Optional mini-, recap- or review-lessons
- Course readings vary in difficulty level

Process



- Students access and engage with content in multiple ways (e.g., presentation slides, pdfs, video, audio, digital texts)
- Supports address the range of student skills (e.g., glossary of terms, website links, infographics)
- Students engage with content in flexible groupings that provide them with different collaboration and learning opportunities (e.g., individual, partner, small group, interest, abilities)
- Open-ended activities have a variety of entry and exit points and levels of cognitive engagement
- Students learn about themselves and 'own' their learning
- Extra practice or skill reinforcement options

Product



- Students have a menu of options to demonstrate learning across products, modalities (e.g., written test or audio recording, different audiences)
- Interest-driven, authentic assessments (e.g., driven by interest survey, personal preference or experience)
- Flexible groupings, check-in points and timelines
- Assessment options (e.g., quiz, test, question options)
- Varying success criteria in rubrics (e.g., novice, professional)

Environment



- The common good, solidarity and the dignity of the human person is modelled and illustrated in all aspects of the virtual learning space
- Co-created Catholic learning community agreement with clear expectations posted prominently within the platform, easily accessed
- 'Question of the Day' posted with students invited to respond by commenting or pasting a website link with related information
- The online learning community is honoured as a sacred space where Christ is found, proclaimed, and witnessed through educators and students.

In Differentiated instruction, the relationship between student and teacher is paramount; students crave personalization, not automation. In fact, when teachers personalize instruction for their students, they illicit deeper cognitive skills from them.⁷ The motivation, agency and sense of community that differentiation offers learners in the virtual learning environment maximizes their potential and inspires them to become life-long learners.

OUR TRANSFERABLE SKILLS: THE ONTARIO CATHOLIC SCHOOL GRADUATE EXPECTATIONS

The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations (OCSGEs) is a unique means through which Catholic education educates the whole child throughout adolescent and into adulthood. As transferrable skills, the OCSGEs include competencies and attributes that will help students flourish as contributing citizens throughout their lifetime. When teachers model and incorporate skills outlined in the OCSGEs in the virtual learning context and students are provided with multiple and varied opportunities to demonstrate them, the entire teaching and learning community benefits. An online learning platform that is equitable and accessible, for example, enables students to develop into a self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner. The ability to demonstrate learning through multiple means of expression, in a variety of groupings and through a variety of modalities, empowers students to mature as an effective communicator, a self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner and a collaborative contributor. so to nourish the social-emotional development of all learners.

Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations — A Vision of the Learner



2. AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR who speaks, writes and listens honestly and sensitively responding critically in light of gospel values.



3. A REFLECTIVE, CREATIVE AND HOLISTIC THINKER who solves problems and makes responsible decisions with an informed moral conscience for the common good.



1. A DISCERNING BELIEVER formed in the Catholic Faith community who celebrates the signs and sacred mystery of God's presence through work, sacrament, prayer, forgiveness, reflection and moral living.



4. A SELF-DIRECTED, RESPONSIBLE, LIFELONG LEARNER who develops and demonstrates their God-given potential.



5. A COLLABORATIVE CONTRIBUTOR who finds meaning, dignity and vocation in work which respects the rights of all and contributes to the common good.



6. A CARING FAMILY MEMBER who attends to family, school, parish and wider community.



7. A RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN who gives witness to Catholic social teaching by promoting peace, justice and the sacredness of human life.



“Drawing together creates the conditions for the Church to become a place of dialogue and a witness to life-giving fraternity.”
— *Christus Vivit*, §38

LEARNING IN COMMUNION WITH OTHERS

“A learner’s ‘distance’ from [their] teacher is not measured in miles or minutes.”⁸ (Michael G. Moore). Before the internet existed, Michael G. Moore, Professor Emeritus of Education, developed a theory of ‘transactional distance’ to describe the ‘psychological and communication space to be crossed, a space of potential understanding between the inputs of the instructor and those of the learner.’ Moore also identified three interactions during learning that are essential to student success, especially when that learning occurs in the virtual environment: student-content interaction, student-facilitator (teacher) interaction and student-student interaction.⁹ Incorporating universal design and differentiated instruction into these interactions helps ensure their integrity and bridges transactional distance in the virtual learning context.



Going Forward: Use the guiding questions in Appendix 3 to reflect on how the content and format of your course will impact student-content, student-teacher and student-student interactions.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Because humans are social beings, learning increases when it occurs in communion with others. When students believe that their teachers understand and want to respond to their interests, strengths and needs, they become more attached to their learning and therefore more intrinsically motivated to apply their God-given talents. The result? More learning! And when the peers in their Catholic learning community are interested in similar topics, ideas and problems, with multiple opportunities to discuss and approach them collaboratively, transactional distance is additionally overcome. Engagement and belonging overcome distance.

“Accompaniment imitates the gradual unfolding of God’s plan of salvation through time, or the pedagogy of God. It seeks to form disciples in a way that is respectful of human nature, patient and understanding, and builds on the graces given by the Spirit.”
– *Art of Accompaniment*, p. 19.

#DigitalCitizenship

	#DiscerningBeliever <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ I believe that God is always with me – even in my online activity ❑ I witness online to my experience of God's love expressed to me in Jesus Christ ❑ I rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance and conduct myself online as a Joyful Disciple ❑ I believe in forgiveness and am forgiving and never vengeful online
	#EffectiveCommunicator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ I communicate clearly, honestly and with sensitivity while online ❑ I use my voice online to speak up for others and show I care about them ❑ I choose words that are life-giving when commenting or posting online ❑ I work to ensure that I can be proud of my online voice and digital reputation
	#ReflectiveCreativeHolisticThinker <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ I share my ideas in a respectful way ❑ I approach conflict online with knowledge, understanding and prayer ❑ I make wise choices and informed decisions when navigating online ❑ I use the internet to advocate for kindness, humility, love and hope in the world
	#SelfDirectedResponsibleLifelongLearner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ I set goals and continually work to improve myself as a digital citizen ❑ I reflect on the digital footprint that my online activity creates ❑ I exercise Christian leadership online to set a positive example for others ❑ I maintain a healthy balance between my online and offline activities
	#CollaborativeContributor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ I collaborate with others online ❑ I value everyone's work and use other's digitized media ethically ❑ I use my God-given gifts and talents when contributing online ❑ I use the online forum to build on my strengths and for the benefit of others
	#CaringFamilyMember <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ I treat all people online with respect as we are all created in God's image ❑ I represent myself well during my online interactions ❑ I recognize how my online activities affect my family and my school community ❑ I show care and respect for God's creation and everything in it
	#ResponsibleCitizen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ I am a peacemaker in the digital world ❑ I stand up for what is right even when it's not popular ❑ I witness to the fact that all life is precious ❑ I advocate for a just and compassionate society



[Click here to view the downloadable/printable high resolution poster.](#)

APPENDIX 2

Going Forward: UDL, DI, and My Professional Practice

Key Points	Applications to the Virtual Learning Content	Impact/Influence on my Professional Practice
Learning for All K-12		
Universal Design for Living		
Differentiated Instruction		

APPENDIX 3

Reflecting and Discerning: Interactions in the Virtual Learning Context

Moore’s ‘Interactions’ are spaces where there are opportunities for students to engage with learning.

- 1. **Student-content interaction:** students are exposed to and interact with content materials (e.g., blogs, videos, podcasts) and create new content (e.g., digital artwork, portfolio, group podcast).
- 2. **Student-teacher interaction:** the ways that students experience the presence of a teacher (e.g., rapport, encouragement, mentorship).
- 3. **Student-student interaction:** students connecting with and learning from one another (e.g., asking questions, providing support).

Use these guiding questions to consider how interactions will be shaped in the virtual teaching context. Refer to the principles of UDL and DI as you reflect and respond.

What are some challenges and opportunities you might experience while building student-content interaction? Which principles and strategies, such as equitable use, simplicity and personalization, enhance student-content interaction?

Thinking about student-teacher interaction, what are the ways you help students get to know you, feel safe and develop trust? What do you consider your teaching strengths to be and how are they communicated and recognized in the virtual context?

Reflect on student-student interaction opportunities in your course. Do students have multiple opportunities to interact with each other in different ways, such as discussion forums, peer collaboration and flexible groupings?

ENDNOTES

1. E. Edwards and M. Fullan. Mark Edwards and Michael Fullan in conversation about Digital Leaders for the Future. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AVBfCmS0fl>
2. Learning for All, 66.
3. E. Edwards and M. Fullan. Mark Edwards and Michael Fullan in conversation about Digital Leaders for the Future.
4. C. Tomlinson. How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms, 1.
5. Learning for All, 64.
6. Tomlinson, How to Differentiate in Academically Diverse Classrooms, 2.
7. Microsoft in Education Canada Team. The Class of 2030 and Life-Ready Learning: The Technology Imperative: A summary report, 16.
8. "University of Waterloo, Fostering Engagement: Facilitating Online Courses in Higher Education. <https://contensis.uwaterloo.ca/sites/open/courses/FEFOCHE/toc/unit-2/2b.aspx#top>.
9. Ibid.

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Our Mission

Catholic Virtual Ontario provides equity of access for Catholic secondary students to take secondary credits developed and taught by Catholic teachers.

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