

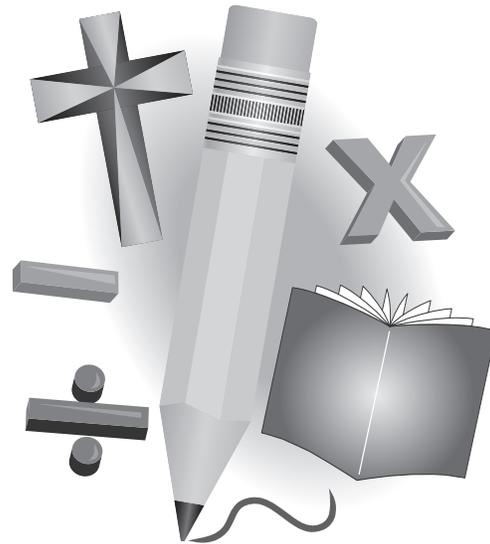
# Viewing Curriculum Through the Lens of Faith

Imagine your favorite bread recipe and consider for a moment all the skills required to choose it and prepare it. In science you learned which foods help us live and grow. In social studies you learned the best climate for certain crops so you can choose the best source for your ingredients. In language arts you learned to read and follow written directions. In math you learned skills that allow you to measure the different ingredients. In the visual arts you learned to appreciate texture, color, and form so that you can appreciate the many kinds of bread. And in religion you learned something even greater—what it means to be bread for one another.

Each subject area in curriculum can be taught as separate and distinct with a clear and isolated view of its discipline. However, when you begin to link one subject with another, just as you might do when choosing and preparing a bread recipe, concepts begin to come together and hold more meaning for your students. This is especially true when religious concepts become the yeast that integrates the various subjects of the curriculum.

## Cross-curricular Learning

The educational research of Caine and Caine (1991) concluded that learning is best accomplished when information is presented in meaningful, connected patterns. In a cross-curricular learning environment, similar ideas are taught in concert throughout various subject areas. As students see an idea threaded through several disciplines at once, their learning is enriched and enhanced. Because the basic process for the human brain is to search for meaning and patterns, holistic experiences lead to quicker and easier recall.



Cross-curricular learning leads naturally to more experiential learning activities, such as project-based learning, research-based writing, student presentations, fine-arts activities, and team teaching and learning. You can even offer students options for expressing their learning within each of these activities. Researcher Jacobs (1989) states that these types of learning opportunities in cross-curricular learning environments lead to more self-direction, higher levels of homework completion, and better attitudes toward school. Students feel engaged with their learning as they make connections across disciplines and with the world outside the classroom.

Lipson, another researcher, summarized the following results in 1993, noting that cross-curricular learning leads to:

- stronger application of skills
- faster retrieval of information
- an integrated knowledge base
- greater depth and breadth in learning
- positive attitudes in students
- more time for curriculum exploration

## Religion Across the Curriculum

In a Catholic school, you have the blessing of teaching in an environment where you can integrate secular and religious knowledge. Your students begin to see that faith concepts are not abstract principles but living realities in their lives. By providing cross-curricular opportunities connected through religion, you help young people view all of life in a more holistic way, through the lens of faith. Children who have this gift of a faith-based education can use this lens to view all of life.

One Catholic school teacher described an experience in which her class was studying the biblical account of the Exodus, while in their social studies class they were learning about ancient Egyptian culture and religion. By connecting these two subject areas, the students' appreciation of each was enriched. The scriptural account of the Exodus added to the understanding of the culture, time period, and faith of the Egyptian people. Understanding Egyptian culture allowed students to also understand the Hebrew people better. Students made better connections, achieved a higher level of thinking about both sets of information, and made connections between the two. Most of all, the teacher proclaimed, the students' own faith was enriched. The *NDC* speaks of the Gospel mandate to inculturate the message of Jesus in the lives of our learners. (See *NDC* 21.) Cross-curricular learning opportunities can facilitate that inculturation.

## Faith-Based Decisions

Cross-curricular activities also provide an opportunity for you to address the various learning styles and needs of your students. When these needs are met, students gain in conceptual knowledge. The ability to help students make connections, solve

problems by looking at multiple perspectives, and incorporate information from different subjects will be essential ingredients for success in the future. As ethical decision making related to new scientific discoveries and technology development becomes increasingly more important for this century, our students need that lens of faith to assist them in making those critical decisions for the future.

One way to prepare your students to make these faith-based ethical decisions is through your attention to the Church's social teaching in your curriculum. The seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching are at the heart of our Catholic tradition. They challenge students to build a more just world. When these themes are integrated throughout the curriculum, students gain greater understanding of the teachings and learn skills for applying them to varied situations calling for service, generosity, and leadership. As they do so, they will learn that God is truly among us—in every aspect of life.

*Faith First Legacy Edition* has a unique cross-curricular feature. At the end of each unit you'll find an ethical dilemma related to a principle of Catholic Social Teaching that was taught in the unit. A second page holds three cross-curricular activities to help students integrate and apply the principle.

### FOR REFLECTION

- *What are you now doing to incorporate cross-curricular faith activities into your lessons and throughout the school?*
- *Identify some concrete ways you can integrate Catholic Social Teaching throughout your curriculum.*