



# Catechesis in Action:

## Some Guiding Classroom Principles

### 1. Be intentional about your preparations.

*Articulate a vision for the year: What hopes do you have for your students' formation in this catechetical year?*

- Strategize about how you will cover material over the course of the year, making connections between lessons and taking care to emphasize liturgical celebrations ([Advent](#), [Lent](#), [Easter](#), [saints' feasts](#), and [holy days](#), including your parish's patronal feast).
- Dedicate sufficient time to planning each lesson.
- Before each session, arrive with enough time to have all necessary materials ready, including photocopies and technology. Seek out any help you might need.

### 2. Set up an environment that promotes engagement.

*While you may be limited as to how you can modify your assigned space, do all you can so that the furniture placement, temperature, lighting, and cleanliness all communicate a welcoming environment.*

- Strive for a space characterized by simplicity, order, beauty, and peacefulness. Identify and remove or relocate potential distractions or obstructions. Do what you can to make the space feel more like a setting for a retreat, such as adding sacred images, items that highlight the liturgical time, or even plants.
- Use quality materials (as far as your budget allows). Bibles that are falling apart are not the best expressions of the beauty of the Word of God, nor do they help your students feel valued!

### 3. Make sure that prayer has a central place.

*Give [prayer](#) pride of place both literally and figuratively.*

- If possible, dedicate an area for prayer. The space can be changed to follow the progression of the liturgical year. Students can help prepare the prayer space, bring in



appropriate items to add, even arrange and care for flowers. A floor cushion or chair can be added to encourage students to spend time in personal prayer there.

- Introduce a variety of prayer forms and provide meaningful experiences of prayer and liturgy. Dedicate time for silence and stillness. Truly pray with your students, rather than simply leading or facilitating prayer.
- Pray for your students.

#### **4. Cultivate relationships with students, parents, and the wider parish community.**

*Practice hospitality with parents and students. Rely on the gifts of the community.*

- Exhibit a genuine interest in the students and what is going on in their lives. Familiarize yourself with what TV shows they watch, what music they like, and what hobbies and activities your students are involved in. Be sincere in what you share with them.
- Develop a partnership with parents through sharing and communication about the material covered, ways to extend the lesson at home, or even a quick note to affirm the student. Ask for parents' insight about how to help their child flourish in your class. Involve parents in projects and other creative opportunities.
- Seek out mentors, such as experienced catechists and others who are knowledgeable of Church teaching. Invite the pastor, parish staff, ministry leaders, and members of the local community to share their witness. Plan projects that will help students to take ownership of and serve the parish and local community.

#### **5. Establish and clearly communicate expectations.**

*Investing time in articulating expectations early on will help each session run more smoothly. Consider what you want students to know about class rules, procedures, and use of materials and space.*

- You may wish to spend the first session or two partnering with the students to establish class rules (such as: *I will arrive on time and come prepared for class; I will maintain an atmosphere of peace and respect; I will display Christian values in the way I dress, speak, and behave*) and post them someplace visible. Challenge students to examine the rationale



behind each rule. For instance, taking care of the space by cleaning up and respecting the materials is living out good stewardship, caring for creation and everything entrusted to us.

- When giving an assignment, provide clear instructions. Be sure to give sufficient context or offer examples that illustrate what you mean. Demonstrate proper use of materials.

## **6. Propose a joyful, meaningful, coherent message tailored to your students.**

*Identify and create the most advantageous conditions for seeking out, welcoming, and deepening the Christian message. Adapt what is provided by your catechetical text to meet the needs of this particular group.*

- Use various strategies that aim to engage students in the ways they learn best — audibly, visually, kinesthetically, alone, together, etc.
- Craft lessons that are suitably challenging and age-appropriate. Be mindful of your students' interests, backgrounds, questions, attention spans, developing motor skills, and energy levels.
- Seek out support from parents, experienced catechists, and your Catechetical Program Director to make adaptations or implement new strategies for working with students with disabilities or intellectual or developmental differences.
- Let your life witness to the joyful character of the Christian message by your excitement, passion, and animated disposition.

## **7. Maintain an attitude of humility before God and before your students.**

*While you have a lot to offer as catechist, your primary role is to live, together with your students, a shared experience of encounter with God.*

- Cultivate an attitude of openness, joy, wonder, and gratitude before both the material and the students. Embrace opportunities for deeper reflection on content you are presenting and for learning from your students.



- Let your words remain at the service of God's message for your students. Practice discernment in distinguishing between your desire to say something and your students' need to hear it.
- Balance the required mastery of content (eg: *student must be able to recite the Our Father or name the 7 Gifts of the Holy Spirit*) with a more profound education to wonder and a spirit of contemplation before such great mysteries.

This Resource was compiled by Fatima Monterrubio Cruess, Resource Coordinator at the **Catholic Apostolate Center**. You can find more resources like this at our website, **CatholicApostolateCenter.org**.

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