

# The Pedagogical Approach of the *Grow in Love* Series

Each weekly lesson in the *Grow in Love* series follows a process that takes the children on a journey from life, to faith, to life. This pedagogical approach is affirmed in the *General Directory for Catechesis*, which calls for ‘... a correct application of the correlation and interaction between profound human experiences and the revealed message’ (153). The *General Directory* goes on to state that it is by ‘correlating faith and life’ (207) that religious education and catechesis ‘bridges the gap between belief and life, between the Christian message and the cultural context’ (205).

The pedagogical approach adopted in the *Grow in Love* series is underpinned by the certainty that we must not only teach children the faith tradition, but also how that faith tradition impacts on their lives. Again, the *General Directory for Catechesis* is helpful in this regard, stating that: ‘... experience is a necessary medium for exploring and assimilating the truths ... of Revelation’ (152). It is clear, then, that the *Grow in Love* series aims not only to educate children in knowledge of the Christian faith, but also to encourage them, and their families, in their journeys as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The pedagogical approach employed in the *Grow in Love* series has three main parts, which we call ‘Let’s Look’, ‘Let’s Learn’ and ‘Let’s Live’. The key characteristics of each of these parts are outlined below.

## ‘Let’s Look’

Each chapter begins by exploring some aspect of the life experience of the children. This is chosen with a view to the content that will be presented in the next part of the chapter. Our aim in starting with the children’s life experience is to help them to be able to recognise God at work in their lives, in the wonders of nature, in the love of their families, in the very joy of living. In order to be able to recognise these signs of God’s presence, we must be people who are tuned into what is going

on around us. That is why, in the first part of each lesson, we try to teach the children how to be alert to the many things that are going on around them. In this way, we hope that they will be able to find God, as the prophet Elijah did, in the gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:11-16). Our aim is to help children to become people who know how to stop and stare.

## ‘Let’s Learn’

In the next part of the chapter, the teaching of the Church is presented in a way that is suitable to the age and developmental stage of the children. What we teach in Junior and Senior Infants (P1 and P2) is built on and developed as the children move through the school. For example, when we teach that water is God’s gift, which gives life to all living things, we are laying the foundation for when children will learn that the waters of Baptism are symbolic of the gift of new life in the Spirit. And when we explore the wonder of life in their own bodies and in the natural world, we are laying foundation for future teaching on the Church’s call to respect the sacredness of all life. The most important thing that we are trying to communicate to children at this stage is that they are loved unconditionally by God, who created them in God’s own image and likeness; that God sent his Son Jesus to show us how much he loves us; and that there are many things in our world and in our lives that are constant reminders of the love of God.

## ‘Let’s Live’

Finally, we take the children back to their lives and we ask them to think how they might live, perhaps a little differently, if they allowed what they have learned to shape what they do. It is one thing to know *about* something – to hold some information or facts on a given topic. It is quite another to learn *from* that information *for* one’s own life. Obviously this part of the process will change significantly as the children get older and are more aware and capable of making choices about how they act.

## Key Characteristics of this Pedagogical Approach

The pedagogical style that is followed in *Grow in Love* is characterised by three qualities: respect, invitation and conversation.

### Respect

It is very important to have a profound respect for the views and reflections of the children. This is a course in religious *education*, and so all the principles of good education apply. Faith, as well as being a gift from God, is also a choice. The Catholic Church says it well:

In spreading religious faith and in introducing religious practices everyone ought at all times to refrain from any ... hint of coercion or a kind of persuasion that would be dishonourable or unworthy. (*Declaration on Religious Freedom*, 4).

### Invitation

Second, the style ought to be characterised by the quality of invitation. We are *inviting* the children to wonder about this material with us. We can't *make* someone believe in God's love for them. We can, however, propose in a convincing manner that God loves them and we can lead them to be aware of the wonder of that reality.

### Conversation

Third, the classroom needs to be a safe place for conversation, where children can reflect privately or talk to a partner or the whole class about matters raised in the programme. It is essential that opportunity is given to students to engage with what is taught in a reflective and thoughtful manner. There ought to be space to hear the views of others on different topics because in a good learning environment, we all learn from and with one another.

