

Using *Grow in Love* in the Classroom

It has been said that the best teachers teach from the heart, not from the book. While those involved in writing the *Grow in Love* series have made a sincere effort to ensure that the resources offered as part of each programme are as helpful as possible for teachers, it is not intended that they be used slavishly. To this end, there are three key principles to keep in mind when using *Grow in Love* in the classroom. These are outlined below.

The Role of Culture

A constant challenge to the authors of any educational resource is to take account of the wide variety in their reader's reality. Even within a small island like Ireland, there will be differences in race, ethnicity, religion, religious practice, social class, gender, family relationships, proper names, idiom and urban or rural environment. While a sincere attempt has been made to reflect the diversity within Irish society in the *Grow in Love* series, in practice it will be up to teachers to use their own professional competence to adapt the material presented in each programme according to the experiences and realities of the children in their class. The *General Directory for Catechesis* tells us that such a process of discernment will affirm the elements of culture that give meaning to people in their everyday lives, and which have the potential to mediate their experience of God; at the same time it will challenge the particular aspects of culture that are contrary to the Christian message. This can only be done by individual teachers who are conscious of the unique setting within which they teach.

It is also important that teachers are conscious of the fact that not all children in their class are baptised Catholics. These children may like to take part in the programme of religious education outlined in *Grow in Love*, in order to learn about and from the Catholic Tradition. Opportunities are also provided for both teachers and children to learn about and from religious traditions other than Christian, and other life stances and worldviews. This practice conforms with guidelines offered by the Congregation for Catholic Education, which states that:

Catholic educators ... should be open at all times to authentic dialogue, convinced that in these circumstances the best testimony they can give of their own faith is a warm and sincere appreciation for anyone who is honestly seeking God according to his or her own conscience. (*Lay Catholics in School*, 42)

It is also true that those children who are baptised Catholic come from homes with varying levels of faith commitment. Ideally, the first people who help children to grow in their faith are their families at home. This is not always the case and, for some children, the Catholic school may be the only context where they are given the opportunity to learn about the faith into which they were baptised as infants. While this situation places undue and indeed unfair responsibilities on the teacher, it may also be true to say that the opportunities for spiritual development that the teacher can provide in such circumstances may be of particular importance in the lives of these children.

The Role of the Teacher

Continuing on from the point above, the role of the teacher is paramount in delivering any programme of religious education to children. In fact, while a religious education programme is a useful resource in the task of communicating faith, it is the individual teacher in each particular classroom who brings the programme and the faith it seeks to communicate to life. A teacher can create in the classroom an open, respectful, caring, trust-filled atmosphere where children can feel valued and have a sense that their uniqueness and potential are recognised. He/she can also help the children to know they are individually known and loved by God, that God is always listening to them, and that they can talk to God about what's going on in their life – good and bad. In this way, teachers can be witnesses to the faith that they teach, rather than mere communicators of it.

The Role of Home and Parish

Share the Good News, the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, provides the Irish Church with principles and guidelines for evangelisation, catechesis and religious education. The *Grow in Love* series follows these principles and guidelines. According to the Directory, religious education in school '... contributes to the faith development of the child. It doesn't do it all, nor should it, since the parents are the primary educators of their children in the ways of the faith. The school works in partnership with the home and the parish.' *Share the Good News* goes on to state that 'co-operation between home, parish and school is essential in encouraging young children in coming to know who they are and to whom they belong' (142). The document states this most clearly, 'The school and

its teachers support parents/guardians and their parish in the Christian initiation of children, not the other way round' (102).

The *Grow in Love* series therefore seeks to reflect the fact that the Catholic primary school is part of a much larger community. It gives opportunities

to make regular, concrete links with the children's family, and strives to ensure that parents are enabled to support their child's religious education.

Grow in Love also references the life of the local parish and offers opportunities for children to see their role as part of that community of faith.

GLOSSARY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES USED IN THE *GROW IN LOVE* SERIES

Artist's Chair

The INTO document, *Creativity and the Arts in the Primary School*, states that children should be enabled to look at and respond to their own work, to the work of other children and to the work of artists. Reserving a special chair in our classrooms (to be called 'The Artist's Chair') on which children are asked to sit and speak about their own art is one technique that can be successfully used here. You can also make any chair into an Artist's Chair by covering it with a decorative scarf or blanket.

Feely Bag

The purpose of the feely bag is for children to guess an item or items by touch. It aids both kinaesthetic and vocabulary development. A feely bag can be made using a pillow case or a cloth shopping bag.

Teacher In Role

The Primary Curriculum Support Programme describes teacher-in-role as a drama strategy where the teacher takes on a role in the drama in order to excite interest, provoke tension and develop the story. Follow these steps when going 'in role' as a particular character:

- Agree on a hat or object to show that you, the teacher, are in role
- Ask the children to watch carefully and see what they can find out about (you) the character
- Go into role for less than a minute or so, adopting a pose, possibly saying something and giving a clue about a dilemma

- Come out of role by taking off your hat/ removing/putting down the object. Ask the children what they found out.

Hot-seating

Hot-seating involves students questioning a character from a story, poem etc. At this level, this character will usually be played by a teacher who is in-role.

Inside Voice

We introduce the 'inside voice' to children as a way for them to pray in a meditative and contemplative manner. We differentiate between the inside voice and the indoor voice, which they might use to pray vocal prayers. We teach the children that they can talk to God and those in heaven at any time using their inside voice. It is a voice that no-one else can hear.

Learning Through Play

Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework emphasises the role of play in children's learning. *Aistear's* guidelines for good practice tell us: 'By helping children to take part in different types of play on their own and with others, and by providing a well-resourced play environment inside and outside, adults can greatly enrich the learning opportunities that play provides.' (70)

Sample Yearly Scheme

GROW IN LOVE FOR JUNIOR INFANT/P1

The *Grow in Love* programme for Junior Infants/P1 is divided into nine themes and also includes a selection of seasonal lessons which should be

taught at particular times of year, as indicated. A sample yearly scheme may be as follows:

September and October

- Theme 1: My Family
- Seasonal Lesson: Autumn
- Theme 2: Our World (Week 1)

Mid-term break

November and December

- Theme 2: Our World (Weeks 2 and 3)
- Seasonal Lesson: In November, we remember
- Theme 3: Advent and Christmas

Christmas break

January and February

- Theme 4: The Holy Family
- Seasonal Lesson: Lent (Ash Wednesday)*
- Theme 5: Jesus

Mid-term break

March

- Seasonal Lesson: St Patrick
- Theme 6: Holy Week & Easter*

Easter break

April and May

- Theme 7: The Church
- Seasonal Lesson: Mary
- Theme 8: Water

June

- Theme 9: We Give Thanks
- Seasonal Lesson: Summer
- Seasonal Lesson: Grow in Love!

* Lessons related to Lent, Holy Week and Easter may need to be taught earlier or later in the sequence, depending on when Easter occurs.