Ontario Catholic Elementary Curriculum Policy Document Grades 1-8
Religious Education

Part 2: Instructional Approach and Strategies

Renfrew County Catholic District School Board, December 2012
2.1 Religious Education, Religious Instruction, Catechesis

**Religious Instruction**
- (Gen Dir Catechesis)
- = Religious Education
- = Education to Faith
- = Catechesis
- = Chr. Education in the Faith

**Religious Education**

- **Context:** School
  - where culture is assimilated in light of faith
- “Underpins, activates, develops and completes the educational activity of the school.” (GDC 222)

**Catechesis**

- **Context:** Normally Parish
  - which celebrates sacred mysteries (of our faith) throughout liturgical year
- School can offer catechetical activities (e.g., thru chaplaincy, parish-school activities)
2.1 Religious Education, Religious Instruction, Catechesis (Cont’d)

Religious Education needs to respond to all student stances

- **Truly Engaged** as disciples of Christ;
- **Seekers** trying to understand better the Gospel
- **Indifferent** to Gospel’s claims, but perhaps open to understanding role of Christianity in today’s culture

Religious Education’s response to student needs

- **For Believers:**
  - helps them better understand Christian message.
- **For Searching (& doubting):**
  - offers possibility to discover what faith in Jesus Christ is.
  - provides Church response to questions.
  - helps examine own choices more deeply
- **For Non-Believers**
  - Rel Ed takes on missionary character = missionary proclamation of Gospel ordered to decision of faith which catechesis will nurture and mature (GDC 75)
2.1 Religious Education, Religious Instruction, Catechesis (Cont’d)

Religious Education
1st Step in New Evangelization

Needs to be complemented by catechesis

Brings *seeking, non-believing* students into contact with Gospel of Jesus Christ

Has catechetical dimension for believing students

Has catechetical dimension for believing students

Brings *seeking, non-believing* students into contact with Gospel of Jesus Christ

Needs to be complemented by catechesis

Religious Education
1st Step in New Evangelization
2.1 Religious Education, Religious Instruction, Catechesis (Cont’d)

Privileged place of dialogue between faith & culture

A place where students come to understand that faith brings meaning to all life

The Catholic School

Place of Formation - for Christian Service - for vocation - for responsible participation in political/social community life
2.1 Religious Education, Religious Instruction, Catechesis (Cont’d)

Through cross-curricular teaching, religious education becomes a lens through which students can understand the world and their place within it. (p. 15)

- the way students understand history,
- the role of religion in culture,
- the person’s responsibility to care for nature,
- the values and attitudes that promote safe inclusive communities,
- other elements of importance to the Christian life,
- the values and attitudes that promote the need for ethics in the workplace,
2.2 Methodology Appropriate to Religious Education

... therefore, because of its relationship to the whole process of evangelization, religious education in Catholic schools should incorporate those methods of the tradition which have proven to promote good religious formation. (p. 15)

Religious Education must ...
- involve systematic instruction
- support parish catechetical programs
2.2 Methodology Appropriate to Religious Education (cont’d)

Methodology for Religious Education Supporting Parish Catechesis: Essential Elements

- Systematic Instruction in Doctrine of the Faith: creed, moral precepts, social teachings
- Presentation of Sacred Scripture & Tradition as God’s ongoing self-revelation
- Respect & Attention to Human Experience
- Critical Analysis of Culture & Society in light of Church Teaching
- Application of Catholic Worldview: to religious, ethical, social, political issues.
- Variety of Learning Experiences, Strategies: to address needs of all students.
2.2 Methodology Appropriate to Religious Education (cont’d)

Opportunity for
- Self-reflection
- Critique of Self
- Critique of Society
In light of Christ’s message and Tradition

Opportunity for
- Prayer and celebration that respects religious freedom

Opportunity for
Sharing experience of God and faith through:
- Story
- Discussion
- Community service

Methodology for Religious Education: *Essential Student Opportunities*

Development of
- Appreciation for Catholic tradition to promote willing participation in life of Church.

Development of
- Moral Responsibility
  - Gospel values
  - Christian virtues to form good citizens

Development of
- Rel Ed specific skills: (critical thinking/analysis, interpretation, reflection, application of learning to life)
2.2 Methodology Appropriate to Religious Education (cont’d)

Program’s Interpretive ("Hermeneutical") Approach to Teaching/Learning
Required Elements & Opportunities

- Seeking to Integrate
- Living of Christian Life
  - Through Participation & Experience
- Understanding
  - Through Exploration & Interpretation
  - Through Application & Appropriation
- Fostering
- Deepening of Understanding
  - Reflection
  - Reformulation of Knowledge
- Forming New Outlook, Approach to Living in Students
2.2 Methodology Appropriate to Religious Education (cont’d)

At any point in the process, students may be asked to reflect on their:
- life experience
- attitudes
- personal beliefs
- cultural myths to identify how the learning experience might alter their understanding of truth, or challenge their values and/or actions.

Through this methodology of reflection, students grow in their appreciation and understanding of:
- the Catholic faith
- the Church that seeks to form them in that experience and the Christian values which they are called to receive and witness in their lives. (P. 16)
2.2 Methodology Appropriate to Religious Education (cont’d)

Component 1: Participation and Experience

1. Participation & Experience
(family, parish, culture, society)
Prior Experience = starting point for new learning (GDC 117)

Prior experience named/examined in light new knowledge of
Gospels, Church Teaching helps students:
+ identify meaning of living the Christian faith
+ appreciate what faith offers our human life
+ develop a framework for growth in religious faith.
+ reconstruct present mind-set
+ develop changes in attitude
+ assimilate new values for living

Suggested Strategies (to explore lived experience):
- Story
- Video
- Brainstorming
- Interviews
- Music critique
- Sharing personal stories
- Review of previous learning

“Experience is a necessary medium for exploring & assimilating the truths ...of Revelation.”
(GDC 152)
2.2 Methodology Appropriate to Religious Education (cont’d)

Component 2: Exploration and Interpretation

Exploring and Interpreting Program Content
- Greatest portion of unit time, largest share of assessment & evaluation
- New information challenges students to identify actions, beliefs, values consistent with truth in Scripture and Tradition to deepen understanding and commitment to faith in Christ.

Sources of New Information:
- RE Texts, CCC, sciences, cultural studies, philosophy, media

Learning Strategies to Capture Student Interest
- role play, reading to comprehend, direct instruction, problem solving, group discussion, media analysis, case studies, research project, etc.

Suggested Strategies:

Memorization
Once at heart of RE’s pedagogical method

Needed emphasis:
Principal formulae of the faith:
- Major Bible Texts
- Dogma,
- Liturgical Responses (Mass)
- Common Prayers

Incorporation into daily prayer, seasonal classroom celebrations.

The Church, in transmitting the faith, discerns contemporary methods in the light of the pedagogy of God and uses with liberty “everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we live and honour and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise.” (Phil 4:8) (GDC 148)
2.2 Methodology Appropriate to Religious Education (cont’d)

Component 3: Appropriation and Application

Our Hope:
students’ faith will deepen and mature through...
- grace of Holy Spirit
- support of parents
- parish catechesis

Students’ Role:
to come to know and humbly cooperate with God, who will transform them in relationship, bringing them to fullness of life.

Prayer and Experiences of Service:
essential parts of religious education supporting parish catechetical activity.

God transforms events in the life of his people into lessons of wisdom, adapting himself to the diverse ages and life situations. Thus he entrusts words of instruction and catechesis which are transmitted from generation to generation.

(GDC 139)
2.3 Teaching Strategies

**Teaching Strategies for Religious Education**

**Reflection**
- on new experience to record, summarize, deepen understanding of our relationship with God
  **Examples:**
  - journaling, biblical reflection, silent meditation, silent or guided meditation, contemplative prayer, peer discussion, meta-cognitive reflection through self-assessment.

**Prayer and Liturgical Celebration:**
- a vital part of Christian formation and the school’s participation in the Church’s mission to evangelize the children we teach.
  Catholic Church has rich history of prayer. Forms should be introduced to students on invitational basis, respecting freedom and dignity (esp. of non-Catholics)
  This includes forms arising from encounter with other traditions such as guided meditation, contemplative prayer.

**Making Connections with the Life of the Church**
Link to life of Church/parish helps prevent faith’s reduction to personal encounter with God.
  **Encouraged Activities:**
  - Sacraments, prayer, retreats, education about sacred objects in local parish
  - Visits to shrines, churches of other rites to build sense of wonder & awe, belonging and encourage participation in the life of the Church.

**The Arts**
- an *indispensable strategy* which breaks open the mysteries of faith at a depth words fail to convey.
  **Examples:**
  - Roublev’s Trinity icon,
  - Rembrandt’s Prodigal Son painting,
  - Great liturgical music expressing our belief in the presence of God in the Eucharist, our roots in Judaism, our trust in God, our responsibility to participate in the life and mission of the Church and more. (p. 21)
2.3 Teaching Strategies (Cont’d)

Teaching Strategies for Religious Education (cont’d)

Exploration of Issues, Research and Inquiry

- not enough to know and understand Jesus’ teachings and those of the Church.
- Needed opportunities for critique:
  - of self
  - of society
  - of culture where one lives
- Needed opportunities to compare:
  - secular society & culture’s values/ideals with those of Christian tradition.
- Examples:
  - Research projects, compare & contrast activities, case studies, discussion, debate to explore issues, dilemmas, options available and consequences of human action;
  - Applying Church teaching to identify options for and make good choices;
  - Research into lives of historical and contemporary persons, saints – people of faith who serve as models for their own lives.

Use of Primary Sources

- When age appropriate and at first through selected passage, students should be given the opportunity to read and interpret primary sources.
- … The use of primary sources helps to develop religious literacy while exposing students to the beauty and truth of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.
- Examples:
  - The Bible
  - The Catechism of the Catholic Church
  - Vatican documents
  - Letters from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario
  (Note: Letters from episcopal conferences, though technically not part of Sacred Tradition, should be part of the primary source course materials)
Religious Education in school supports parish catechesis, reaches out to:
- Believers To help them better understand Christian message
- Seekers Offering deeper discovery of meaning of faith in Jesus Christ
- Indifferent Proclaiming the Gospel with missionary character.

Catholic School, where faith dialogues with culture
- bringing faith’s meaning to all of life
- forming students for vocation, service, responsible citizenship

Religious Education as a “Lens”
- influencing students’ entire world view and self-understanding

Methodology in RE – Key focus areas:
- Knowledge & Understanding of Faith
- Gift of Conversion (change of heart)
- Acquired skills for Christian witness
Ontario Catholic Elementary
Curriculum Policy Document Grades 1-8
Religious Education
Part 2: Instructional Approach and Strategies
Summary (cont’d)

Methodology in RE (cont’d)
Key focus areas:
- Knowledge & understanding of faith
- Gift of conversion (change of heart)
- Acquired skills of Christian witness

Methodology must include:
- Systematic instruction in doctrine (Creeds, moral precepts, CST)
- Scripture, Tradition (God’s ongoing self-revelation)
- Respect/attention to human experience
- Cultural/Social analysis in light of Church teaching
- Applying Catholic worldview to issues (rel., ethical, social, pol.)

Opportunities for:
- Reflection, critique of self & society in light of Gospel and Tradition
- Prayer & celebration, sharing experience of faith, of God in story, discussion, community service.

Development of:
- Catholic tradition to promote willing participation in Church life
- Moral responsibility, Gospel values, Christian virtues for good citizenship
- Rel Ed specific skills (critical thinking, interpretation, reflection, application etc.)
Methodology in RE (cont’d)
Program seeks to integrate:

*Living of Christian Life – Understanding - Interpretation*
Through Learning Cycle framework for transformation, growth in religious faith, assimilating truths of revelation.
- Naming Participation (in life)/Experience,
- Exploration/Interpretation,
- Application & Appropriation

Process fosters **New Outlook, Approach to Living in students**
via:
- Reflection
- Reformulation of Knowledge
- Deepening of Understanding of beliefs & values students are called to witness.

**Component 1: Name/Examine Participation & Experience** *(Starting point for new learning – GDC 117)*
- in light of new knowledge of Gospels, Church teaching
- through a variety of strategies
  * to grow in faith, rel. knowledge, assimilate new values for living

**Component 2: Exploration & Interpretation (greatest portion of unit time, assessm’t)*
- exploring SS, Church Teaching, Prayer
  - via memorization of key biblical texts, prayers, formulae of faith, liturgical responses
  - to identify more deeply with truth of the faith and commit more deeply to Christ.
Methodology in RE (cont’d)

Component 3: Appropriation & Application
Making new learning one’s own, via
- journals, discussion, projects, role play, arts, portfolios, * Prayer, service
- applying new learning to life for new possibilities, choices based on Gospel, Church teaching in cooperation with God’s transformative grace.

*This learning cycle supports catechetical activities of parish and helps students to learn to live Gospel in 21st century.

2.3 Teaching Strategies
- prayer and liturgical celebration (vital to student formation, school participation in Church’s evangelizing mission)
- Reflection (to record, summarize, deepen relationship with God)
- The Arts (breaking open mysteries of faith beyond level of words)
- Connecting with Church/Parish Life (to reinforce communal dimension of our faith)
- Exploration, Research, Inquiry (for self, cultural, societal critique to arrive at good choices)
- Use of Primary Sources (to develop religious literacy, appreciation for beauty, truth of SS and Tradition)