

## The Secret to Effective Lesson Planning

Janet Schaeffler, OP

A youngster, visiting his friend, hugged his dog and sadly said, “My parents just told me that I couldn't have a dog; that was their final answer, and not to ask again.”

His friend thoughtfully replied, “Maybe you need an effective plan.”

“What do you mean?”

His friend answered, “Don't ask for a dog. Ask for a baby brother.”

The next day, the boy returned to his friend's home, with a new puppy in his arms.

Effective plans are crucial for significant accomplishments. For the catechist accompanying others on the journey of faith formation, our ministry doesn't just happen without prayer, preparation, and planning.

### **Preliminary preparation**

After first reading the lesson in the learner's book to see it through their eyes and then the catechist's manual, identify your goal/aim. What is the end result you hope to achieve? What do you want your learners to know and to integrate into their lives in response to your time together?

## **Know the Catechetical Process**

All catechetical processes today (for people of all ages) follow the same steps to enable people to be engaged learners and to connect faith and life. The “so what?” question is crucial.

Movement One: Learners are invited to look at the theme as it is already present in their lives: what they do, what they see others doing, what is going on around them in their world.

Movement Two: The learners reflect critically on these experiences, through reason, memory, and/or imagination.

Movement Three: The Catholic story and vision is made present through Scripture, tradition, Church teachings, the faith life of the Catholic people.

Movement Four: Learners are led to come to see for themselves what our Catholic story means in their lives.

Movement Five: Learners are invited to choose how to respond to the wisdom of the Christian faith. What are they going to now believe, how are they going to relate to others, or what values are they going to live by – because of their new learning?

## **Some Practical Reminders**

- Keep a “Gathering File.” Start a file folder for each lesson/theme you will be teaching. As you come across articles, poems, prayers,

news events, tv programs, websites, various ideas that relate to the theme, drop them in the file so that when you come to planning for that specific lesson, you will have numerous ideas to supplement the plans in your catechist manual.

- Prayer. Pray always; never let prayer be the part of the lesson plan that gets dropped if you run out of time. Prayer can be placed anywhere during the lesson. It is good to begin in a simple prayer to gather everyone, to center the gathering, as a reminder of God's presence; but a more in-depth prayer flowing from the theme can also occur at various times in different lessons. The types of prayer can also be varied throughout the year since we have such a rich tradition of prayer forms to share.
- Variety. We live in a technological, multi-media world where youth are excited by a multiplicity of ways of learning. Don't always do things in the same way. As you share the Catholic story, as you structure your lesson plan, make each lesson alive, utilizing the best and various techniques and methods, rather than the same ones each time you gather.
- Give choices. Everyone doesn't learn the same way. As you invite the learners to make the Catholic Story their own through an activity, give several suggestions from which they can choose (rather than everyone doing the same thing): e.g.: write a

prayer/poem; work with a small group to write a play or prayer service; make up a song; create an image or TV show; design a service project.

- End your session. Save the last few minutes to help your learners summarize the key points (avoiding the question “Nothing,” when asked, “What happened today?” when they arrive home). For instance, with young children, a class puppet can ask questions or share what he’s going to tell his family when he gets home.

### **Some Questions to evaluate my lesson plan**

- Does the plan provide for maximum learner involvement, creativity and connection to life?
- Does the plan engage many senses, many of the multiple intelligences of the learner?
- Will I enjoy teaching this? (If not, my learners won’t enjoy learning.)
- Have I considered how much time is involved in each section? Is it realistic?
- Have I given the learners quiet time to reflect on what they have learned?
- Is prayer an integral part?
- Does the prayer and ritual lead to community liturgy?

- Are the learners being sent forth, knowing their faith, to be disciples in their world?

### **Outline of a lesson plan**

- Based on a one-hour-session

(to explore the meaning/richness of Advent)

2 minutes: Welcome

3 minutes: Gathering Prayer

5 minutes: Review of last session (and connection to this session)

10 minutes: Life Story and Reflection on it:

- Stories, study, drawing, clay, poems, etc. to explore: have you had important visitors come to your house? What do you do to get ready?
- Reasoning, memory, and Imagination activities (Why do you, Have you ever, do you remember, What if, How might you...) to explore Why do you prepare for important guests? How do you feel about preparing? How do you think your guest (your grandmother) feels?

15 minutes: The Catholic Story: Myriad methods (Scripture, stories, catechist's sharing and witness, field trips, media, etc.) to explore the prophets who prepared, Mary who prepared; the history and meaning of Advent; how and why we can prepare, etc.

15 minutes: Connecting Life and Catholic Story: Activities to recall, but mostly to move beyond to the heart and lifestyle (art, music, drama, prayer): why is it a good idea to prepare for Christmas; exploration of ways it can be really done.

6 minutes: Decision for Life: Activities (prayer, journal, discussion) to encourage concrete decision for action: how are you going to prepare?

4 minutes: Summary