



 NCCL
Accompaniment
in Faith

PRACTICES + SKILLS FOR CATECHISTS & EDUCATORS

Video Guide

Planning and Preparation for Teaching
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Planning and Preparation for Teaching

Insights from the Video Presentation

1. Planning and Preparing

Most of us have tried putting together a piece of furniture or a toy for our kids without looking at the directions or checking to see if all the pieces were there, or making sure we have the right tools. Sometimes we jump into things without thinking ahead and preparing.

The same can be true as a catechist and educator. One of the biggest factors in success is the time and effort put into planning and preparation for faith formation sessions. You don't have to script every word you plan to say, but it helps to have a general plan so that the session will have a logical and effective flow.

2. Making an Impression

When you have a guest over for a special dinner and you want to make an impression on this person, you pay attention to details: the menu, the table settings, the lighting, drinks, décor, and so on. Done right, such an intimate encounter can be life-changing. The truth is, every time we host a faith formation session, we want to make an impression on those we teach. We want to impress upon them that this experience—in which they will encounter Jesus—will be life-changing.

3. Setting Aside Time to Prepare

In very practical terms, we can avoid a lot of problems by planning and preparing. On the average, it's a good idea to set aside between 1-2 hours to prepare for a weekly session, using the catechetical resources that have been provided for you: a textbook and teaching guide, a video series and the leader guide, the weekly Scripture readings, and perhaps some online tools provided by the publisher of your resources.

4. Seeing the Big Picture First

If you're at the start of your year, you're going to want to do some long-range planning. You may be provided with a schedule or syllabus to follow but it is a good idea to get a sense of the bigger picture and anticipate what you can cover given the number of sessions you have. Also, it helps to see how your schedule of sessions connects with the seasons and feasts of the Church's liturgical year.

5. Previewing Resources

It's a good idea to take some time to sit down with your catechetical resources and preview them so that you have a good sense of the content and approach it offers. Look for strengths and weaknesses and make adaptations according to your style and your judgment as to what will work best for your learners.

6. Becoming Familiar with Your Age Group

A catechist and educator need to be familiar with the age group they're working with, knowing what they are capable of, what their learning styles are, what their reading level is, and what their needs are. If you're teaching pre-school or kindergarten, you'll be taking a very different approach than teaching junior high and vice versa. Your resource and publisher's web site will most likely provide you with the background you need to better serve your age group.

7. Becoming Familiar with the Resources

Drill down into your catechist guide or leader guide and familiarize yourself with all the resources available to you. Lean on these resources but don't let them overpower you. No resource can replace you, your stories, your humor, your insights, and your passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

8. Beginning in Prayer

As you enter into your planning, pause for prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide and inspire you. Plan your session in a prayerful environment. You can do this by lighting a candle, playing some quiet instrumental music in the background, and dimming the lights. Place a Bible nearby and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the help you need to be focused, loving, and creative.

9. Identifying the Big Idea of the Session

As you begin planning your session, it's important for you to know what your BIG IDEA is. Too often, we try to teach too many concepts. Your best bet is to have a single overarching concept that you will hammer home in a variety of ways. That BIG IDEA should be kerygmatic, meaning that it proclaims the Good News of Jesus.

Your BIG IDEA is not something like, "I'll cover chapter 3" or "We'll get to know the creation story." Rather, your BIG IDEA should be *an announcement of Good News* such as: "God created all things out of love and all of creation reflects God's presence." Now you're talking about an idea that can change how we live each day.

10. Identifying Learning Outcomes

Your focus for planning and preparation should not only be about what you are going to do, but even more so, about what your learners are going to do. You should have 3 or 4 *learning outcomes* that state what learners should be able to know or do as a result of this session. Likewise, those learning outcomes should be measurable. If an outcome says the learners will be able to explain why God created all things, then your plan must include some form of assessment—some way that learners can demonstrate the knowledge you want them to comprehend.

11. Movement 1 – Engaging the Learners

Think of your session plan as a single symphony in four movements. These movements comprise what we call the catechetical process and serve to break your session into smaller chunks. The first movement is to ENGAGE your learners by tapping into their lived experience. This brief segment, usually 5 to 10 minutes, is designed to establish a prayerful climate, capture learners' attention, introduce your BIG IDEA, connect that BIG IDEA to daily lived experience, tap into prior knowledge, and prepare them for the new material about to be presented.

12. Movement 2 – Exploring Catholic Teaching

The second movement is to EXPLORE how Catholic teaching sheds light on that lived experience. This segment is the core of your session and will usually be about 25-40 minutes depending on your schedule. During the EXPLORE movement, you will tap into your catechetical resources such as a textbook, a video series, or some other resource to faithfully and fully present the Catholic teaching that breaks open your BIG IDEA.

Think of this movement as an opportunity for you to introduce new knowledge to your learners and guiding them as they begin applying that new knowledge to everyday living. As they do so, you provide active support, scaffolding, and checks for understanding. Consider breaking down the EXPLORE movement into shorter segments such as reading and discussing, viewing a brief video, or engaging in a learning activity, all designed to reinforce the BIG IDEA. In the EXPLORE movement, ask yourself the following questions:

- What will I do to introduce and explain the topic?
- What vocabulary words do I need to highlight?
- What will I do to illustrate the topic/BIG IDEA in a variety of ways?
- How will I engage learners in the topic?

- What are some relevant real-life examples, analogies, or situations that can help learners understand the topic/BIG IDEA?
- What will learners need to do to help them understand the topic/BIG IDEA better?

13. Movement 3 – Reflecting on the Experience

The third movement is to REFLECT prayerfully on how God can help us to see life with his eyes. During this movement, usually about 10 minutes, you invite the learners to spend time prayerfully reflecting on the Good News of Jesus and speaking and listening to him in a reflective encounter that you are facilitating. Remember, a catechist is not a teacher of a subject, but rather, the facilitator of an encounter.

14. Movement 4 – Responding and Acting

Finally, the fourth movement is to RESPOND by thinking, speaking, and acting in new ways. This movement, usually about 10 minutes, includes an opportunity to review the BIG IDEA, assess learning and comprehension, explore how learners can put into practice what they have learned, provide closure, and engage in prayer before sending learners forth into the world with a new way of being human. In other words, every session should lead to conversion of hearts, minds, and hands.

15. Assigning Time for Each Movement

Once you've compiled the four movements of your session, estimate how much time each of the movements will take and be sure to plan some extra time for each. On your lesson plan or in your teacher guide, next to each movement and activity, indicate how much time you plan to spend on each. Be sure to leave a few minutes at the end of the session to answer questions and to preview your next session.

16. Preparing an Extra Activity

It's a good idea to plan an extra activity or discussion question in case you have time left. Even with your lesson plan in place, be flexible – give yourself permission to adjust your session plan to your learners' needs and focus on what seems to be the most effective way to engage them and facilitate new learning.

17. Visualizing the Session

A good practice is to use your imagination to visualize yourself leading the session you are planning. Picture how you will use your catechetical resources to guide you through the four movements of the catechetical process and to plan how much time you will spend on each.

Compile a list of materials that you will need for planned activities. Imagine problems that might come up and how you might best respond. By visualizing the session, you will feel as though you've already led it once and are now building upon it.

Be sure to gather all the materials you will need to facilitate the session effectively. There's nothing worse than reaching a point in the session when you tell learners to cut pictures out of magazines only to find out that you don't have scissors (or magazines). Be sure to request materials well ahead of time.

Have some alternative activities ready in case something falls flat or just isn't working the way you had hoped. In other words, have plan B ready in case plan A is a dud.

18. Teaching with Confidence

Good planning and preparation for your faith formation sessions will empower you to lead with confidence and calm. If you're a bit nervous at first, relax...that's normal. It shows you're your adrenaline is flowing. Ask the Holy Spirit and the Communion of Saints to guide you...you are never alone.

One more reason to plan and prepare well: the Gospel and God's People deserve nothing less!

Planning and Preparation for Teaching - Checklist

Good planning and preparation empower you to lead with confidence and calm. Use this checklist to plan a session using the four-movement learning process.

1. Before You Begin

- ☐ Have I set aside 1-2 hours to prepare for this session?
- ☐ Have I gathered my textbook, teaching guide, video series/leader guide, weekly Scripture readings, and any online tools?
- ☐ If early in the year, have I done long-range planning and considered how sessions align with the liturgical year?
- ☐ Have I previewed my catechetical resources for strengths/weaknesses and made adaptations for my learners?
- ☐ Am I familiar with my age group's capabilities, learning styles, reading level, and needs?
- ☐ Have I familiarized myself with all available resources, while remembering no resource replaces my own stories, humor, and passion?

2. Beginning in Prayer

- ☐ Have I paused to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide my planning?
- ☐ Have I planned in a prayerful environment (candle, quiet music, dimmed lights, Bible nearby)?

3. Identifying the BIG IDEA

- ☐ Have I identified a single overarching BIG IDEA for this session (not multiple concepts)?
- ☐ Is my BIG IDEA kerygmatic — an announcement of Good News, not just a topic (“God created all things out of love...”, not “We’ll cover chapter 3”)?

4. Identifying Learning Outcomes

- ☐ Have I written 3-4 learning outcomes describing what learners will know or be able to do?
- ☐ Are these outcomes measurable?
- ☐ Does my plan include a way for learners to demonstrate/assess this comprehension?

5. Movement 1 — Engaging (Approximately 10 minutes)

- ☐ Have I planned to establish a prayerful climate at the start?
- ☐ Have I planned something to capture learners' attention?
- ☐ Have I introduced the BIG IDEA and connected it to daily lived experience?
- ☐ Have I tapped into learners' prior knowledge?

6. Movement 2 — Exploring Catholic Teaching (Approximately 25-40 minutes)

Ask yourself the following as you plan this core movement:

- ☐ What will I do to introduce and explain the topic?
- ☐ What vocabulary words do I need to highlight?
- ☐ What will I do to illustrate the BIG IDEA in a variety of ways?
- ☐ How will I engage learners in the topic?
- ☐ What real-life examples or analogies will help learners understand the BIG IDEA?
- ☐ What will learners need to DO to understand the BIG IDEA better?
- ☐ Have I broken this movement into shorter segments (reading, video, activity) to reinforce the BIG IDEA?

7. Movement 3 — Reflecting on the Experience (Approximately 10 minutes)

- ☐ Have I planned time for learners to prayerfully reflect on the Good News connected to the BIG IDEA?
- ☐ Am I facilitating an encounter, not just delivering information?

8. Movement 4 — Responding and Acting (Approximately 10 minutes)

- ☐ Have I planned to review the BIG IDEA?
- ☐ Have I planned a way to assess learning and comprehension?
- ☐ Have I included how learners can put this learning into practice?
- ☐ Have I planned closure and a closing prayer?
- ☐ Does this movement point toward real conversion of hearts, minds, and hands?

9. Timing, Materials, and Backup Plans

- ☐ Have I estimated and written down time allotments for each movement (with a buffer)?
- ☐ Have I left a few minutes at the end for questions and previewing the next session?
- ☐ Have I prepared an extra activity or discussion question in case time remains?
- ☐ Have I visualized myself leading the session start to finish?
- ☐ Have I compiled a complete list of needed materials and gathered them ahead of time?
- ☐ Do I have a backup (“Plan B”) activity ready in case something falls flat?

Quick Four-Movement Session Planner

Use this table to plan the flow and timing of today's session.

Movement	Plan	Time Allotted
BIG IDEA		
1. Engage		
2. Explore		
3. Reflect		
4. Respond		
Materials Needed		
Backup/Plan B Activity		

Reminder

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