

Relationships and Sex Education

Policy and Guidelines
for Teaching and Learning
in Schools and Colleges

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1. INTRODUCTION

Catholic education is always 'holistic'; it is education of the 'whole person', who is on a journey or pilgrimage of life. Its goal of promoting the flourishing of each human person corresponds to the inner yearnings of the human spirit and the human heart. Inspired by the Revelation of God, the aims and pedagogy of such truly Catholic and universal education have at the same time also been proved by lived experience to promote that harmony between body, mind and spirit so keenly sought after in a world often confused about such things.

Human relationships and human sexuality are not 'incidental' to such human flourishing, but instead are part of the core of what it means to be human – which is why this document offers our schools this important guidance as part of helping with the formation of the whole person of young people. Because these aspects of human life are so important for understanding human flourishing, no Catholic education can ever ignore these key areas of life, and neither can the communities in and through which the Church supports and provides such education, namely its schools and colleges. Instead, it is a key part of the Church's educational responsibility to provide for the best possible education and formation in this field.

'Relationship and Sex Education' (RSE) is therefore the overall title under which this document provides a unified 'take' on what is otherwise referred to as 'PSE/PSHE' and 'SRE/RSE' in England and Wales. This document provides schools and colleges with guidelines and tools for best practice. It contains the key principles, content and pedagogy for the provision of Relationships and Sex Education in Catholic Schools and Colleges

As the document makes clear throughout, its aim is to help and support Catholic schools and colleges in providing outstanding RSE in the service of those entrusted to the care of the Church and is the fulfilment of the Church's vocation to educate the whole person.

2. WHAT WE TEACH: THE PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC RSE

The premise of Catholic teaching

The first thing that matters in guiding teaching and learning about human relationships in Catholic schools is to understand what is meant by “Catholic teaching”. In Western society today, the Catholic Faith and its teaching is often presented as “a religious narrative amongst other religious narratives”, something specific for Catholics to live by and pass on to future generations, a set of “norms” or “rules” for Catholics.

However, the pedagogy of Catholic education instead presupposes teaching the truth about God, the world and human nature as both accessible to human reason (‘Natural Law’) and revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Word of God made Man - not “a meaningful story for some” resulting in “rules for Catholics” but instead an understanding of the value, beauty and glory of human nature and human relationships that applies to all humankind even where knowledge and understanding of it is perhaps limited or incomplete. It is true of all human nature, whether we all recognise it or not, that we are created to live in relationships of harmony, trust and love with God, with one-another, within ourselves (as a holistic harmony of body, mind and spirit) and with all creation. And it is true of all human nature that we only flourish if we do so.

Hence guiding the learning of young people about their relationship with God, with themselves and with others is a process of developing their understanding of how to live a good life, a life that alone brings true and complete human flourishing and, in consequence true and abiding happiness - because this way of living the relationships for which we are made is in harmony with who we are as human beings (our human nature). It is only by being good at being human and living out our relational human nature well that we flourish fully as human beings both in this life and in the new creation: how we live has consequences, both now and eternally, and guiding young people to live a good life as children of God is true care of the soul.

Such an understanding is and remains a challenge to the views of our society, but it is truly good news in all its fullness, and Catholic educators are called to ensure – precisely in the service of the full flourishing of the young people entrusted to the care of Catholic schools – that they do not short-change students by giving them less than this vision of glory.

All Catholic teaching about human relationships and human sexuality must thus be based on the wisdom of the Church about how to be good at being human. It is underpinned by the understanding that a good life at once shows forth the truth, beauty and goodness of God the Holy Trinity who is Love and who has created us to be spiritually fertile in love, which makes for true and lasting human flourishing and human happiness.

The human vocation to “love” and to be “co-creator”

At the core of the Catholic understanding of human nature in terms of the relationships through which it is lived, and which forms the basis of these guidelines, stands the goal for each of us to become a “spiritually fertile person”.

The centre of the human person is that desire to be loved and to love, to live and to be creative. ‘Love’ in its variations of “need-love” (a child’s need for parental love), “appreciative love” (as in love of nature) and “gift-love” (the love of a parent), played out in the bonds of empathy, friendship, erotic love and the Love of God is key to what it means to be human. Furthermore, God’s first words to humanity are a blessing of creativity: “Be fertile.” (Gen 1:28) We respond to this exhortation through “pro-creation” in the complementarity of male and female, and through the “co-creation” of human work.cf Gen 1: 26-30 & 2: 15-25).

Central to both the mystery and the seeming paradox of being human is this fundamental desire to love and to be creative, to make a difference - and the unchanging truth that only God *is* Love and only God is truly creative in that he alone brings forth all things from nothing. In consequence, we human beings are perennially tempted to resolve the paradox by making ourselves our own god. God’s invitation, however, is to share in His creativity through free and full cooperation, to be fertile co-creators.

Because of our alienation and estrangement from God in Original Sin (that seeking of independence from God and grasping at God-likeness), suffering enters into pro-creation, co-creation and the harmony of the complementary (Gen.3:16-19). Throughout the salvation history recorded in the Old Covenant, God seeks to restore that original fertility (Dt.30:15-16) - but it is only in Christ that suffering is finally redeemed and our spiritual fertility set free, encompassing at once also our biology, our physical fertility.

This vision is marked by some characteristic features which are of particular usefulness in the context of teaching and learning:

- it sets relationships and human sexuality in the context of personhood, itself a key concept for understanding what it is to be human;
- it sets the biological elements of sexuality (i.e. procreation) in the context of a wider identity, providing in the idea of human spiritual fertility a wide, powerful and beautiful framework for understanding human relationships and creativity;
- understanding this fertility and understanding what it is to be a growing person can go hand in hand, which in turn helps its relevance to be grasped more easily in the context of teaching and learning;
- the concept is faithful to the Church’s language on sexuality and uses the context of categories which are universally relevant, such as relationship, happiness, fulfilment, complementarity, vulnerability, intimacy, making a difference;

- it calls us as human beings to spiritually fertile relationships and away from sterile actions, which is a constructive way of teaching about marriage but also helps to understand why some things accepted in our society are nonetheless contrary to Christ's vision; it helps us to recognise that the teaching of the Church is positive and prophetic and points to a genuine vision of human flourishing;
- it thus helps young people especially understand why Western culture and Christ's Church sometimes give different leads in this area;
- it is a vision fully consonant with current developments in the Church, such as the recent Family Synods and "*Amoris Laetitia*", and indeed the 2015/16 'Year of Mercy' (i.e. the Father revealing his creative fertility primarily through mercy).

Young people in Catholic schools develop in stages towards living out this vision, and the teaching provided by them needs to accompany this appropriately: one could say that childhood is the time to learn how to receive from God's fertility as his child (and so is connected with Baptism and the beginnings of faith), while adolescence is the time we learn how to cooperate with God's "creativity", and so is also connected more with our response to God's love (i.e. Confirmation and with hope). Thus faith and hope are arguably the two key stages of growing into love of God: faith is receiving from him rather than seeking control, letting him be my beginning - and hope is responding to him in his fertility, hoping in him rather than fearing self-annihilation in self-giving. Letting him be my end by whom I am able to enter into the Trinitarian movement of charity in Christ (which is itself the Sacrament of Communion).

The Theology of the Body

In the background of this understanding of the vocation of the human person to become fertile stands the teaching of St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, which itself could be summarised broadly as follows:

1. Human sexuality is beautiful. We are all called to learn to give ourselves appropriately in self-gift to another, and our sexuality is an important vehicle for doing that, because we human beings are bodily creatures, so that our body is the expression of the human person. But we have to learn how to do this fully and do it well!
2. In sexual intimacy, the "language of the body" has the inherent meaning of complete self-giving to another – so that such intimacy outside its full and proper context (which is the unconditional consent of husband and wife in marriage) is inauthentic is, in effect, akin to being untruthful with our bodies, pretending to be what it is not.
3. The Church's teaching on sexuality is beautiful, challenging and at times sacrificial - as is love itself. We all have some impulses that pull us away from that teaching. But following these negative influences always results in harm for ourselves and others - and God wants the good of all and wishes to protect the well-being of every human person.

4. Human beings have the capacity within them to share in the creation of a new human person – one of the greatest vocations anyone can possibly have. What makes sexual intimacy a truly loving act is thus the mutual gift of precisely that capacity to do so, the gift of our fertility.
5. In consequence, human sexual intimacy is both privileged and a truly holistic human act. This in turn is reflected in marital love itself: truly understood, sexual intimacy intends and effects the full union of husband and wife, body and soul.

All pedagogical approaches to teaching human relationships education in a Catholic school need to be founded on the vision outlined above

The core content of Catholic RSE

In consequence, Catholic teaching on human relationships and sex education needs to:

- teach this good news of the meaning of human sexual intimacy to the young as part of evangelization, the proclamation of the good news of Love Incarnate, while also helping to prepare each pupil for a flourishing and fulfilled adult life;
- truly come across as good news: Catholic RSE has to be taught with the confidence that it really *is* good news *for all*; i.e. that every aspect of the Church's teaching makes practical and moral sense as well as theological sense, and leads to happiness and fulfilment in this world as well as in the next. Anything short of this saps life out of the faith as a whole – which is why all recent Church teaching on evangelization makes clear that the Gospel of the Family is integral to the Faith;
- avoid blunting Church teaching by suggesting that it is followed “for religious reasons” or “only applies to Catholics”. To do so immediately negates the premises of Catholic teaching outlined above and empties it of any positive force;
- win souls, hearts and minds by explaining the beauty of the Church's teaching in compelling, accessible language which harmonises with theological teaching and Religious Education but can stand up to scrutiny in its own right;
- convince those involved in teaching RSE. This can be a challenge given that many may never have fully understood or followed Church teaching themselves. It requires training and use of carefully constructed materials which entice with a vision of the beauty of Church teaching rather than upset or be seen to “judge”;
- be applied consistently across the curriculum to ensure evenness and unity of purpose: biology and geography, English literature etc. are areas in which this vision needs to take root as much as in Religious Education.

Some specific goals are:

- Every child should leave the Catholic school system understanding the role of human sexuality within the larger context of their own vocation to live a life of discipleship.
- They should be taught about all kinds of relationships, and especially about how to be a good friend. This is a much neglected but key goal of Catholic RSE in that friendship is the foundation of all healthy human and spiritual relationships: Aelred of Rievaulx exemplifies this (in his 'Spiritual Friendship') by saying that 'Christ is friendship's principle and goal' and that "My friend must be the guardian of our mutual love, or even of my very soul, so that he will preserve in faithful silence all its secrets, and whatever he sees in it that is flawed he will correct or endure with all his strength. When I rejoice, he will rejoice; when I grieve, he will grieve with me". While many today — including many in the Church—uphold romantic and sexual love as the most important form of love, friendship is actually foundational even of these other forms of love.
- They should understand that body and soul are inseparable (until death), so that the body is the outward expression of the soul, and sexuality intrinsic to the human person.
- They should understand the biology of fertility, be familiar with the science behind Natural Family Planning, and why the avoidance of a 'contraceptive mentality' is important. They should also understand why breastfeeding is good for the mother as well as the child.
- They should know about the growth of the child in the womb
- They should know the risks of infertility caused by lifestyle factors such as alcohol use, tobacco use, obesity and lack of exercise for both men and women and that fertility in women declines from the age of 30, dropping more steeply from the age of 35. They should also know what can be done about it through understanding the fertility cycle and treating abnormalities (e.g. with NaProTechnology, which in many instances has better results than more invasive methods). They should know the physical and moral drawbacks of In-Vitro Fertilisation and other artificial methods of infertility treatment.
- They should understand the equal dignity and complementary nature of the sexes, and the demands of motherhood and fatherhood, and how these can be reconciled with the demands of the workplace.
- They taught about marriage in a way that presents it as naturally attractive and shown how to make the best of themselves in preparation for it (or of a single vocation) as well as for a career.
- They should be taught how different kinds of contraception and family planning methods work, their impact upon health and future fertility, and be given realistic failure rates, both mechanical and psychological.
- They should know what is wrong with pornography, sexting, etc.

- They should understand the danger of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, without being put off from the healthy sexual intimacy within marriage.

3 HOW WE TEACH: Towards a Trinitarian Pedagogy

“In beholding the glory of the Trinity in creation, man must contemplate, sing and
rediscover wonder.”

Pope Saint John Paul II, General Audience, 26 January 2000

The ultimate goal of being human is “divinization” (what the Eastern Church calls “*theosis*”): allowing ourselves in this life to be formed into those who are capable of union with God, and ready to be drawn into the inner life of the Holy Trinity, who is an ever active exchange of mutual self-giving, who is Love. In learning to love, we therefore need to be shaped by an approach to teaching and learning that is itself “Trinitarian”, a “Trinitarian pedagogy”.

Such an approach begins with transmitting the truth, beauty and goodness of God who is Love to young people and enables them to develop an understanding of how this can shape their lives, above all in their relationships. Our understanding of human relationships and what makes them ‘good’ is ultimately gained only when viewed through the virtues of faith, hope and love and with a recognition that human dignity is given precisely through our relationship with God the Father, God made flesh in whose person the full truth about humanity is found and God the Spirit who leads us fully into that truth. This opens humanity to the work of the Holy Spirit in mind, body and soul.

To move towards a pedagogy centred on the Trinity will take time, both for young people and for those enabling them in their studies: St. Thomas Aquinas points out that though we may have charity, we falter in leading a blessed life because of “contrary inclinations”. Forming habits that lead to our flourishing and our happiness is a lifelong journey which we can only have the opportunity to begin if we are evangelised by the proclamation of the Good News of our human nature and calling.

Some aspects of this will be taught directly, others will be expressed as part of the life of the school - it is, after all, impossible to teach or learn authentically about the love of God, ourselves and our neighbour if the school environment does not strive towards deepening and expressing this habit in the way it lives and works.

There is a key aspect of our understanding of the Holy Trinity in particular that offers a useful analogy with human learning and thus informs the pedagogy we aim for, namely that the persons of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are traditionally linked with the classic transcendental properties of being (of all that is real): truth, beauty and goodness. In turn, they also correspond with

the human desire to learn and the sense of awe and the pursuit of a blessed, happy life: our intellect seeks truth, our senses desire beauty and our will searches for what is good.

Since all human learning, especially that learning of our vocation to love and to be co-creators (which is what RSE is about) is thus linked with seeking truth, beauty and goodness, it is (1) in effect closely ordered towards the Holy Trinity and (2) shapes what a Trinitarian approach to RSE will look like: it will seek to engage the minds of young people with the wisdom of the Church's teaching, its truth, its beauty and its goodness to enable them to lead more fulfilled lives and inspire a sense of awe and wonder at the beauty of Creation and themselves, and the special place in God's love that humanity holds.

This will involve finding ways to teach about Christ, who is the source of the relationship with the Holy Trinity into which we are called, and must be the focus of the RSE curriculum – *“Christ at the Centre”* in practice. From this encounter follows the desire to lead a life inspired by truth, beauty and goodness, a blessed life. In the language of the Church this is called a virtuous life. It is also – and because of this – a truly happy life.

We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.

Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005)

Virtue and character education

A virtue is an interior disposition, a positive habit, a passion that has been placed at the service of the good. (*YouCat*299)

The language of “virtues” is the language we use to describe how human beings grow into the living-out of their human nature. Virtues are character-strengths, “habits of flourishing”, which enable us to be “good at being human” (and thus flourish). They are acquired through training and practice, gradually becoming “second nature” to us. The more a person works to make their behaviour habitually based on love, goodness, truth and beauty, the closer they come to fulfilling their human nature's goal and happiness.

“Virtue” to the modern ear smacks of narrow self-righteousness and has lost the true anthropological and moral element of its meaning. However, the recognition of the centrality of the virtues for human flourishing is not restricted to a Christian or “religious” understanding only (though it is also common to many faiths and religions), nor is it just continuing and completing the work of the

philosophers of the ancient world such as Plato and Aristotle: developing young people with strong moral character is also a very topical and current aim shared by many in education (irrespective of faith).

Embedding our teaching of human relationships and human sexuality in a wider virtue and character education is thus relevant to all young people as it addresses the fundamental human question that unites us all, “How can I truly flourish and be happy?”. The answer to this question consists precisely in the essential unity of the virtues in a human person of strong and good character:

In other words, the organic unity of the virtues always and necessarily exists in habitus, even though forms of conditioning can hinder the operations of those virtuous habits. Hence the need for “a pedagogy which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery”. Reaching a level of maturity where individuals can make truly free and responsible decisions calls for much time and patience. As Blessed Peter Faber used to say: “Time is God’s messenger”.

Pope Francis Evangelii Gaudium 171 (2013)

The role of parents

Knowing that marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the Church wishes to speak and offer her help to those who are already aware of the value of marriage and the family and seek to live it faithfully, to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and to those who are unjustly impeded from living freely their family lives. Supporting the first, illuminating the second and assisting the others, the Church offers her services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family.

St. John Paul, Familiaris Consortio 1 (1981)

All being well, a child’s first experience of true love is in the home. The earliest relationships of our lives do so much to shape the beliefs we hold about our self-worth and our relationship with God and others.

The Church recognises that in faith, as in all things, parents are the primary educators of their children - life in school and in the parish seeks to work with and for parents in a supportive partnership to help them fulfil their vocation. St. John Paul II taught without equivocation that the right of parents to educate is: " primary in regard to the educational role of others, on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children.... fundamental because it is rooted upon parental transmission of life to and

love for their child....irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others." [Familiaris Consortio N.36]. This principle underpins our approach to RSE.

Parents are the first educators of their children in sexual matters and the Church calls them – as the prayer over them at the end of the Baptism liturgy says – to be also ‘the best of teachers’ in this as in all other matters. This matters because in sex education, how you teach is part of what you teach. Much of a child’s sexual education is already picked up within the family from example and observation. However, there are aspects of puberty, or the “becoming able to procreate”, which are not self-explanatory. Children have a right to hear about anything so intimate and potentially scary directly from their parents and guardians. They are often best placed to communicate sensitive information individually, with love and in the right measure for each child.

There is something profoundly fitting about learning for the first time how you came to be from the very persons who gave you life. Whenever this works well, it contributes to the trust between parents and children growing into a more adult friendship, one which will last not only through adolescence but into full maturity and beyond. Giving practical guidance becomes a lot easier.

Trust between parents and children is especially important today when pornography, bullying and sexual predators are a click away. Internet filters may help control computer use, but they also present a challenge to beat – and children’s technical knowledge is regularly superior to adults’. What is more, most social media, such as have no parental oversight. Unfortunately, there is no fool-proof way to protect children. The best one can do is to educate them early to understand right from wrong, to be honest, assure them one is ‘on their side’ and trusts them, and help them to learn to how and when to press the ‘off’ button if they encounter inappropriate content.

This is recognised by the UK Government’s official guidance to schools on delivering sex education, which says that working in partnership with parents “is essential to effective sex and relationship education”, before going on to say that “research shows that children and young people want to receive their initial sex and relationship education from their parents and families, with school and other adults building on this later” (for the full text see the “Sex and Relationship Education Guidance” Ref. DfEE 0116/2000, chapter 5);

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/283599/sex_and_relationship_education_guidance.pdf).

The role of schools and teachers

One of the main aspects of your teaching is of course the communication of the truth and beauty of the word of God and knowledge of the Bible is an essential element of the curriculum for teaching the Catholic religion. There is a connection between the scholastic teaching of religion and the existential deepening of faith, as happens in parishes and in the various ecclesial structures. The very person of the Catholic religion teacher constitutes this bond: to you, in fact, in addition to the duty of the human, cultural and didactic competence proper to every teacher, belongs the vocation to make it clear that the God of whom you speak in the classrooms is the essential reference point of your life. Far from constituting interference or a curtailment of freedom, your presence on the contrary is an effective example of that positive spirit of secularism which makes it possible to promote a constructive civil coexistence, based on reciprocal respect and loyal dialogue, values which a country always needs.

Address of Benedict XVI to the Catholic Religion Teachers (2009)

The role of our schools and thus also of those who teach RSE in them is to 'assist parents, who are the primary educators of their children, in the education and religious formation of their children.' [Christ at the Centre, A1.2]

Providing support to parents

It is probably true to say that many parents of children and young people in our schools find it hard to teach RSE. The reason that parents may find it difficult to speak about this with their children is not that they are ignorant of the fundamentals – they are parents after all. Yet sexuality is a private subject which lies close to the centre of who we are, physically, emotionally and spiritually (see above). It can therefore be natural to shrink from explaining sexuality. To many parents, the task of teaching their children about RSE can appear much more difficult than it is. In fact, the biology of fertility is fascinating, and adults can find themselves intrigued to learn and discover more.

Supplementing the work of parents

We expect our schools to make space in the curriculum for the education in relationships and sex education, especially in circumstances where a school judges this to be particularly necessary – as well as where statutory requirements for SRE exist, of course. This also means that many of our schools may need to take a more proactive role in providing sex education than they have in the past. Where this is so, it may be most appropriate for a school to make use in its own teaching of the sex-education resources designed. It is important that schools abide by the principles of “maturity-appropriateness” and “pastoral sensitivity” set out above when providing sex education.

Once again, the task of the teacher is here as always made easier when supported by parents, and efforts should always be made to ensure that this is the case whenever possible. It is recognised that this can be a challenge as parents may choose to abdicate some of their responsibility to the school, often unsure of how to discuss the Church's teaching or how to discuss their own lives. This makes the witness of the teacher more crucial so that young people hear the teachings of the Church as authentic truth.

The teacher may recognise that they themselves need formation, support and possible spiritual guidance in their own understanding of the Church's wisdom to enable them to deepen their vocation in this regard.

Members of the school community who are not Catholics

Not all students in Catholic schools are members of the Catholic Church; not all are Christians, and sometimes many are not. In these circumstances, the religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected, a freedom explicitly recognised by the Church (cf. The Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 6 (1988)).

On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own integrity to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation of the whole human person based on the principles outlined above; this is its right and its duty, and since much within these principles for RSE is based on concepts of human flourishing easily accessible to reason and also part of many traditions both religious and non-religious, it will usually be straightforward to deliver the whole of the Catholic RSE programme without violating personal conscience or the freedoms of individuals and their families. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose.

All those of different faiths or none in our schools have freely chosen to be part of them. They have thus freely chosen to enter into a respectful dialogue with the Catholic faith as they were welcomed into the school. This means, among other things, that there is no reason to avoid areas of difference in RSE, rather, this can present an opportunity to deepen understanding of different points of view and acknowledge and celebrate those held in common, whilst recognising that the primary reason for the school's existence is to offer education illuminated by and faithful to the Catholic faith.

As in all aspects of the Catholic ethos of our schools, we aim for a fruitful and accessible combination of integrity and generous hospitality: schools fully faithful to their reason for existing and openly accessible to others from outside the Catholic Faith.

Safeguarding

All work pertaining to teaching about human relationships and sex education must follow the safeguarding policy and procedures that govern the school and abide by the law. This means more than 'child protection': it promotes the welfare of children and protects them from harm.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and safeguarding the vulnerable should be a key part of teaching about human relationships as part of the Church's teaching about human dignity. This entails a dual duty to protect the vulnerable in the present and to educate against future abuse and exploitation.

When talking about human relationships, particularly with reference to sexual matters, teachers will never know the experiences present in the room and must always frame their contributions in pastorally sensitive and appropriately differentiated ways so that young people are safe, their personal maturity and integrity are respected and safeguarded, while also knowing that there is someone in school to speak to if they need help and support with particular issues.

4. WHEN WE TEACH: Catholic RSE through the key phases and stages of school life

Primary school

The time tabling of RSE at Primary level is a matter for professional discretion. Sometimes RSE will be taught in discreet lessons, other times it will link with the science curriculum and at other times may be an exploration of the Liturgical year.

Foundation Phase / Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1

In this early stage of formation, much of the teaching and learning about relationships is based on forming habits of behaviour that look after the self but also show respect and courtesy for others, such as tidying up and saying “thank you”. Forming these habits physically is key to later developing a mind open to the respect of self and the respect of others. However, it is also important to remember that young children are filled with awe and wonder at the world around them and they can be encouraged to recognise that they are a wonderful part of Creation too. They can also listen to stories of Jesus and draw conclusions about how he behaved with kindness, mercy, compassion and courage.

The key to relationships education is built at this age by enabling children to develop a sense of their own worth as their view of Creation is how it relates to them in their own life. This gives context to the science curriculum, it celebrates the “Wow!” in creation and growth of ourselves and in animals. It also begins to foster respect for uniqueness and difference within God’s creation, in which we as spiritual beings live alongside animals and are called to responsible stewardship of them and of all creation (cf. *Laudato Si*). Concrete examples of how to experience this may include seeing a new baby, listening to the stories of Jesus as a baby and as a child and talking about how he experienced every aspect of growing up, just like them. This may also include or looking at how they have grown in knowing how to see what is good and make good choices, in the same way they have grown taller. As they get older, they can begin to express how they would like to grow into their own vocation from God in the future (cf. Newman’s “God has created me to do Him some definite service: he has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another.”). They can use examples from the parables of how Jesus guides us to a blessed and happy life in him and begin to understand why this matters and how the nature of sin harms ourselves, our common life and our ability to respond to our calling to eternal life in God.

A fundamental part to knowing how to build relationships with others is understanding forgiveness and the importance of mercy. School can be the core of their experience in this aspect of their life. Jesus’ life provides examples of the joy of friendship, for example in the feeding of the five thousand or cooking supper for the disciples after His resurrection at Tiberias (Jn 21:1-14) Jesus helps his friends at the wedding at Cana (and maybe listens to his mother!) and forgives them when they had let him down, in the story of Thomas the apostle (Jn 20:20-9) Jesus calls us to love one another and we can choose to do this by growing more like Him.

God calls us all into relationship with him. A story that explains this is the story of the prophet Samuel (Samuel 3:1-20). How do we treat our bodies if we know they can be filled with God's purpose? Well-being is also about a state of mind and it is important children learn to understand that though they may behave inappropriately, it is their behaviour that is wrong, not themselves, Jesus tells us through many parables that God never tires of being merciful.

Key Stage Two

The science curriculum for this age group emphasises the cyclical nature of life. Chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes, "There is a season for everything..." beautifully expresses the contemplation of the task of life God has given humanity and the wide range of emotional responses we have to the changes we encounter. Of course, one of these changes is puberty, a change for the child and their families as well as the teacher. Probably the most successful approach to developing an understanding of puberty as part of RSE, in addition to understanding the biology, is to invite children to notice the wonder of how the body develops and reflect on the words of Pope Benedict XVI, "We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is a thought of God." Or, as Jeremiah puts it, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations." (1:4-5)

- Families are complex things! This is illustrated well in many of Jesus' stories such as the forgiving father and rather irritated older brother (the prodigal son). However, Jesus teaches us to know God as Father and one of the deepest realities and metaphors of the Christian faith is experiencing God as a loving parent, forgiving and merciful.
- Friendship. Jesus offered friendship to those on the margins of society, such as Zacchaeus, children should reflect on how they choose friends and know it is right to tell (admonish) someone who is behaving in an unfriendly way.
- Faith. By Key Stage 2, children will be beginning to form their own ideas about their faith and be aware of the faith of others. Faith directs the way we behave and the Catholic faith describes a particular, sacramental nature of our relationship with God. Marriage is one of those sacraments. Jesus teaches about marriage and God's plan for marriage, right from the beginning of Creation (Matt:19.1-12). Notice that the disciples immediately begin questioning Jesus: sometimes following a life of faith is challenging but it leads to a deep-seated peace. When we fail and ask forgiveness, God is always merciful.
- Community is not just a "group" of people, it is a group of people with common aims. What is everyone in the school working towards? How is Jesus part and foundation of the community?

As well as understanding the changes in their body, a key point here is to recognise that pupils will need to ensure that their spiritual and emotional maturity keeps pace with their bodily maturity. Catholic children need to be taught how to pray, how to reflect on the

Word of God and the Catholic Faith, how to participate in the Mass and sacraments and to consider how this challenges their relationships with themselves and others. All children need to be helped to mature spiritually and emotionally. Love of neighbour can only be an authentic act of faith when the child knows they are formed and loved by God and called to a life in the Holy Spirit. In a busy school life, children need to find time for God who is already waiting for them.

Secondary school

In delivering all this, it is important to remember that even at Secondary level the maturity and “readiness” of young people (especially boys) to study things related to romance and sexuality will vary substantially. The focus of Trinitarian Pedagogy on beauty, truth and goodness can be especially helpful here, since it allows one to teach much away from an explicitly romantic and sexual context, and *then* show how those principles apply to those contexts as well, so that things “hit home” without the need to speak about romantic relationships and sexuality in isolation or in a way that does not differentiate appropriately (i.e. one should teach beauty in a context that emphasises the breadth and depth of the concept beyond its narrow application to human bodies, dress and romantic poetry).

Trinitarian pedagogy looks at how teaching offers the opportunity to bring people into relationship with the Trinity through Christ, an idea familiar in the Liturgy where prayers are addressed to the Father, through the Son and in communion with the Holy Spirit. Large areas of the RSE curriculum will overlap with the science curriculum. In order for young people to deepen their understanding of science in the context of Revelation, it is useful if departments plan together wherever possible.

The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) describes how religious education in schools is not catechesis, but the two are linked. Religious Education in a Catholic school is confessional, that is it directed towards deepening understanding of the Catholic faith. The Church provides schools as an act of love, the first stage of catechesis, “impregnating and transforming the whole temporal order, appropriating and renewing all cultures” (GDC:48 1997), to bear witness to the Christian life and to “proclaim explicitly the Gospel” (GDC:48 1997). RSE in a Catholic school is part of this holistic educational process and as such should aim to inspire in young people a sense of awe and wonder as well as an understanding of the teachings of the Church based on the revelation of the Gospels. Teaching RSE in a way that opens opportunities for catechesis, whether in the present or later in life, needs to creatively demonstrate why the Church’s teaching about human loving is part of God’s purpose for humanity and embracing this will enable young people to deepen their own sense of purpose and self-worth in the world.

The remaining paragraphs of this chapter provide some illustrations as to how the content of RSE prescribed in the respective curriculum documents can be delivered through using a range of approaches, a “necessary inter-disciplinary dialogue” (GDC:73 1997). They are not designed to add to the curriculum as such but to provide inspiration and some tools for teaching it.

Using nature, art, literature and music to express beauty in creation (nature) and human life (art, literature and music), including (but not limited to) the beauty of love and relationships Teaching about human loving has so often been based on the ‘thou shalt not...’ approach, which is relevant but inadequate on its own. In fact, the beauty of the human form and the profound expressions of love which uplift sexuality are to be found and celebrated in many works of art and literature. Art often expresses the nature of different relationships and can be a way to explore with young people their own feelings and responses about the nature of beauty and its links with the spiritual. A brief example of this could be to use an extract from a love poem, in this case Robbie Burns ,

O my Luve's like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June: O my Luve's like the melodie,
That's sweetly play'd in tune.
As fair art thou, my bonie lass, So deep in luve am I;
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear, And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
And I will luve thee still, my dear, While the sands o' life shall run.

Who would Burns be addressing this poem to? Why does he choose the different images? Why are things in nature beautiful for him? What do they think love is like? How is this different from love for family members or for God? How is it the same? Poets such as Gerald Manley Hopkins express their relationship with God in poetry, particularly the struggles of choosing God.

Another example to use is the poem ‘A Marriage’ by R.S. Thomas:

*We met
under a shower
of bird-notes.
Fifty years passed,
love's moment
in a world in servitude to time.
She was young;
I kissed with my eyes
closed and opened
them on her wrinkles.
“Come,” said death,
choosing her as his
partner for
the last dance, And she,
who in life
had done everything
with a bird's grace,
opened her bill now
for the shedding
of one sigh no
heavier than a feather.*

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Nothing can substitute listening to and studying the scriptures to illustrate the complete vision God has shared with humanity through Jesus. To understand the Church's teaching about human love young people should explore the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis (Ch. 2-3). This offers firstly, the opportunity to understand that this story is not a creation myth amongst others but one that reveals truth about humanity's relationship with God and secondly, that this is what Jesus references when he is teaching about marriage, affirming it as inspired by the Word of God. The Church also teaches that Genesis contains God's revelation about human origins expressed in symbolic imagery and language. If we lose this understanding that it does refer to human history then we lose the whole truth about

original sin. It also shows much about humanity's behaviour in relationships, given paradise, it is thrown away: given perfect love, Adam and Eve disagree - he blames her, she blames the serpent. The sensual nature of love is expressed in the "Song of Songs". If students were given this text cold, would they recognise it as being from the Bible?

Let him kiss me with all the kisses of his mouth.

Your love is more delightful than wine;

delicate is the fragrance of your perfume,

your name is an oil poured out,

and that is why the maidens love you.

Draw me in your footsteps, let us run. (Song of Songs 1:1-4)

Love is presented as sensual and beautiful and, as the 'Song of Songs' is explored, it expresses the joy of a bride and bridegroom.

Teaching about virtues, how to lead a moral life is not an exclusively Catholic pursuit. The Ancient Greek, Socratic ideal, suggests that moral behaviour is taught through developing practical wisdom (prudence) as a virtue, wisdom is the pursuit of truth through the exercise of reason. In Catholic understanding, Jesus is the truth and through a deeper understanding of him, the Word of God, wisdom unfolds inspired by faith, hope and love. It is easy for young people to lapse into becoming very reactive to life and live in a way that is relative to their current world view. Using ethical questions, based on virtue teaching, encourages them to recognise they can instead become proactive and take charge of how they react to and feel and how this changes their relationships with themselves, their peers, their family and God. This can be based on real life examples, such as ideas of fairness in school, or on stories, such as the Wisdom of King Solomon (1 Kings 3:16-28). These should always have a Christian frame of reference to understand what terms like justice or rights mean in a holistic vision of humanity's relationship with God. Virtue ethics are a particularly useful frame to talk about areas such as abuse on social media or what respect means in romantic relationship.

RSE needs to be open to opportunities for young people to express their love of God through acts of worship, prayer and reflection to enable them to be open to Grace and able to assent to the teachings of the Church. The relationship we have with ourselves is a key

part of this, as only through giving time to reflect on the person we are, knowing our worth in the eyes of God and understanding that we can grow in faith and love. Teaching simple Christian meditations is a way for everyone to calm their mind and be open to the still, small voice of God. The Liturgy is an expression of the beauty of the Trinity's relationship with humanity. Understanding how God the Son "emptied himself" and assumed a human nature, the total gift of self, is a profound insight into God's love and His purpose for humanity and the precious nature of our persons as embodied creatures which are nourished by the Eucharist and made Temples of the Holy Spirit. Pope Benedict XVI also advocated that the lives of the saints should be studied as witnesses to a life in relationship with God, an inspiration for young people on how to lead a moral life.

I am convinced that the true apologetics for the Christian message, the most persuasive proof of its truth, offsetting everything that may appear negative, are the saints, on the one hand, and the beauty that the faith has generated, on the other.

For faith to grow today, we must lead ourselves and the persons we meet to encounter the saints and to come into contact with the beautiful.

Ratzinger, J. (2005) On the Way to Jesus Christ 38