

Reflection Spaces and Relationships and Sexuality Education

Introduction

'The *Primary School Curriculum* celebrates the uniqueness of the child, as it is expressed in each child's personality, intelligence and potential for development. It is designed to nurture the child in all dimensions of his or her life – spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical. The curriculum recognises the integrity of the child's life as a child and aims to cater for his or her needs and potential as they evolve day by day. By meeting these needs, the curriculum enriches the child's life and the foundations are laid for happiness and fulfilment in later education and in adult life.'

– ***Primary School Curriculum: Introduction***¹

Reflection spaces are provided in two ways in *Flourish: A Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme for Catholic Primary Schools*.²

1. In line with the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum (primary), a wide variety of active learning strategies are used in implementing SPHE in order to take account of the learning needs of students and the wide range of objectives in the curriculum. In

¹ Department of Education and Science, *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1999, p6.

² *The Education Act, 1998* (Section 9(d), Section 30 (2)(b) and (d)), makes clear the connection between curricular provision and the function of characteristic spirit. This is relevant in all curricular areas in a primary school including SPHE/RSE because all subjects, in line with the primary curriculum, seek to address the spiritual, moral and values dimensions of education. The primary curriculum makes this clear (see *Introduction*, p.23, 36, 57), as does the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2020, Dublin: The Stationery Office, p.4). The SPHE curriculum also recognises this connection (see Department of Education and Science, *Primary School Curriculum: Social, Personal and Health Education*, Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1999, pp. 2, 12).

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Flourish, music, art, drama, poetry, mime and story-telling invite critical reflection. They also draw out from students, moments of ‘pause’ and reflection.

2. Secondly, there are specific suggested reflections at the end of the lessons. These fall into three categories: general reflections, reflections related to the story of Jesus and reflections that might be understood as prayers.

Flourish recognises through the provision of additional end-of-lesson reflections that teachers may require other kinds of reflection material. Ultimately, teachers will use their professional judgement and agency, informed by the schools RSE policy, their school’s context, parental perspectives and their students’ learning needs and interests, in terms of what kind of end-of-lesson reflections will work best in their classroom.

Reflection in RSE/SPHE mirrors the reality that Catholic schools are, by their nature, reflective learning spaces. Through all curricular areas, pupils are invited in a myriad of different ways to reflect on what they are learning, and to think through the implications of these learnings. Reflection also happens in lots of different ways outside the classroom; holistic education demands that we understand reflection at the heart of all that happens in our schools. In providing for reflection spaces, *Flourish*

attends to the primary curriculum, to the current SPHE curriculum, to work being undertaken by the NCCA in terms of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, the NCCA lead review of RSE as part of SPHE that began in June 2018 and to current developments in education in terms of what it means to be a Catholic primary school in the twenty-first century. Each of these will now be briefly explored to help you see the importance of reflection at the heart of this new RSE programme for Catholic schools.

The Primary Curriculum and SPHE Curriculum

The current primary curriculum suggests a number of overarching aims and, from these, proposes some specific aims. These include:

- to enable children to apply what they learn to new contexts in order to respond creatively to the variety of challenges they encounter in life;
- to enable children to develop spiritual, moral and religious values;
- to enable children to develop personally and socially and to relate to others with understanding and respect.³

The reflection spaces provided as part of *Flourish* speak to all of these aims as well as those more specific to RSE, as part of the SPHE curriculum: Social, personal and health education (SPHE) provides particular opportunities to foster the personal development, health and well-being

3 Primary School Curriculum: Introduction, pp. 34–35.

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of the individual child, to help him/her to create and maintain supportive relationships and become an active and responsible citizen in society.⁴

As suggested in the SPHE curriculum, reflection allows pupils to build their self-confidence. *Flourish* allows children to develop a language around feelings and emotions, (SPHE curriculum, Strand: Myself) and to express and record experiences, opinions, feelings and emotions in a variety of ways (Strand: Myself and Others). It provides opportunities for children to develop self-awareness (Strand: Myself). Reflection on learning is a core methodology suggested by *Flourish* and reflects the NCCA SPHE curriculum clearly in this regard.

Central to the current SPHE curriculum is that pupils would realise that growth and change are part of the process of life and are unique to each individual specifically in terms of physical, social, intellectual and spiritual growth. Spiritual growth within the SPHE curriculum is linked to fostering wonder and imagination by reflecting and by availing of quiet time. *Flourish* provides those meanin-making spaces necessary for this kind of deep reflection.

In addition, by providing connections to other subjects, (see document included on curricular

links), an integrated approach allows for many aspects of SPHE, and, in this case, specifically RSE, to be dealt with in the context of relevant subject areas. Through a variety of learning experiences across the curriculum children work together, reflect critically, engage in dialogue, solve problems and make decisions. The approach suggested by the current SPHE curriculum that seeks to build on learning year on year across themes and topics is clearly embedded here in *Flourish*; this means that reflection builds on reflection and does so in an age and stage appropriate way.

Draft Primary Curriculum Framework

Flourish addresses suggested possible developments from the NCCA's work on a revised primary curriculum framework. *Flourish* specifically speaks to two important emerging concepts within the most recent draft of the framework, namely Fostering Wellbeing and Being Creative.

Fostering Wellbeing:

Wellbeing is now a very well-embedded concept at Junior Cycle. It is also found in Aistear as one of four key themes and is an emerging theme in the NCCA review of Senior Cycle. All three levels, early childhood, primary and post primary attend or will attend to wellbeing as a core function of education in our schools.

⁴ Primary School Curriculum: SPHE, p. 2.

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In primary schools, this competency is understood as developing a pupil's ability to be as physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually healthy as they can be. It fosters self-awareness and promotes the importance of children seeing themselves as capable and resourceful. This supports their ability to deal with the normal challenges of life, become resilient and cope in a variety of situations and circumstances. The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines how Fostering Wellbeing, contributes to children's demonstration of how they can be physically healthy through physical activity, eating healthy food and self-care. It helps children become positive and engaged in their learning and realise their own uniqueness and potential. It supports healthy relationships with themselves, their peers, their family and the wider world. It also recognises the spiritual dimension of living, which enables children to experience a sense of awe and wonder and know that life has a meaning.⁵

Teachers are encouraged to provide opportunities for pupils in terms of fostering wellbeing in

- Showing awareness of how to make good choices in relation to wellbeing;
- Participating with growing confidence and skill in physical activity;
- Being self-aware and resilient ;
- Acting responsibly and showing care towards self and others Being spiritual and having a sense of purpose and meaning;

- Being persistent and flexible in solving problems;
- Being able to assess risk and respond.

Reflection time, quiet time, contemplation, mindfulness and meditation are all ways in which the Catholic school allows for pupils to become self-aware and resilient, to become aware of making good choices, to act responsibly and to engage in meaningful problem-solving for their own lives. For this reason, providing some reflection time as part of the *Flourish* programme might be understood by teachers as a vital way of fostering wellbeing in the students' lives and in the wider school community.

Being Creative:

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* suggests that this competency recognises children's innate creativity. *Flourish* provides children with opportunities to employ their creative energy through a range of different creative behaviours – specifically through exploring, clarifying and expressing ideas, feelings and experiences. The programme uses drama, mime, art, music, story-telling and poetry to appeal to students' curiosity, imagination and creativity. Reflection is understood as a core dimension of being creative as it provides children with a moment to pause, to consider options, to become empathetic and to grow in terms of their own confidence and self-esteem. Being creative allows students to also develop the language and disposition necessary to manage their emotions.

⁵ *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, pp. 8–9.