



Sacramental catechesis in Catholic schools. Significant experiences of best catechetical practices

Catequesis sacramental en colegios católicos. Experiencias significativas de buenas prácticas catequéticas¹

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing social transformation, marked by secularization, the crisis of trust in the church, and changes in family structure, raises the urgent need to renew catechetical practices to effectively respond to new educational and ecclesial contexts. Within this framework, this article presents the results of research on significant experiences of sacramental catechesis in catholic schools in Chile. The main objective is to identify the characteristics that define the best catechetical practices and to evaluate their consistency with the principles of the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997) and the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020).

The study uses a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted with pastoral coordinators and catechists from eleven catholic schools located in different regions of Chile. The content analysis enables the identification of common elements in these best practices, highlighting the integration of catechesis into a pastoral itinerary, the use of differentiated spaces for the experience of faith, the implementation of inductive methodologies, the use of active and participatory didactics and the promotion of a welcoming environment, empathy, and active listening in catechetical encounters.

The research establishes criteria for recognizing the best catechetical practices; some of these key criteria include student attendance and active participation, the creation of a welcoming environment and empathetic listening, community growth in faith, feedback from the catechized themselves and the continuity of the catechetical experience throughout the school's pastoral itinerary. These characteristics not only align with

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the theoretical framework proposed by the church, but also reflect an update in catechetical practice to address contemporary challenges.

The findings of the research lead to the conclusion that good catechetical practices in Catholic schools can be replicated in other similar educational institutions. These practices promote a school catechism that goes beyond the sacramental preparation, projecting it as an integral, participatory, and inclusive formative experience, such an approach contributes to faith maturation and fosters a personal and community encounter with Christ. This proposal is presented as a catechetical model consistent with the evangelizing mission of the Church and with the Institutional Educational Project (IEP) of catholic schools, reinforcing their identity as ecclesial spaces of communion, dialogue, and synodality.

Keywords: catechesis, Catholic school, best practices

RESUMEN

La transformación social actual, marcada por la secularización, la crisis de confianza en la Iglesia y los cambios en la estructura familiar, plantea la necesidad de renovar las prácticas catequéticas para responder a los nuevos contextos educativos y eclesiales. En este marco, el presente artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación sobre las experiencias significativas de catequesis sacramental en colegios católicos de Chile. Su objetivo principal es identificar las características que definen las buenas prácticas catequísticas y evaluar su coherencia con los principios del Directorio general para la catequesis (1997) y el Directorio para la catequesis (2020).

El estudio adopta una metodología cualitativa basada en entrevistas semiestructuradas y grupos focales realizados con coordinadores de pastoral y catequistas de once colegios católicos de diferentes regiones de Chile. El análisis de contenido permite identificar los elementos comunes en estas buenas prácticas, destacándose la integración de la catequesis en un itinerario pastoral, el uso de espacios diferenciados para la vivencia de la fe, la implementación de metodologías inductivas, la utilización de didácticas activas y participativas, y la promoción de la acogida, la empatía y la escucha activa en los encuentros catequísticos.

Asimismo, la investigación establece criterios para reconocer una buena práctica de catequesis, entre los que se destacan la asistencia y participación de los catequizandos/as, la creación de un ambiente acogedor y de escucha empática, el crecimiento comunitario en la fe, la retroalimentación de los propios catequizandos/as y la continuidad de la experiencia catequética a lo largo del itinerario pastoral escolar. Estas características no solo se alinean con el marco teórico propuesto por la Iglesia, sino que también evidencian una actualización de la práctica catequética en respuesta a los desafíos contemporáneos.

Los hallazgos de la investigación permiten concluir que las buenas prácticas catequísticas en colegios católicos pueden ser replicables en otras instituciones educativas similares. Estas prácticas promueven una catequesis escolar que no se limita a la preparación sacramental, sino que se proyecta como una experiencia formativa integral, participativa e inclusiva, contribuyendo a la maduración en la fe y al encuentro personal y comunitario con Cristo. Esta propuesta se presenta como un modelo de catequesis coherente con la misión evangelizadora de la Iglesia y con el Proyecto Educativo Institucional (PEI) de las escuelas católicas, reforzando su identidad como espacios eclesiales de comunión, diálogo y sinodalidad.

Palabras clave: catequesis, escuela católica, buenas prácticas

Problematization

The progressive secularization (COES, 2019), the crisis of trust in the Church (Cordero, 2020) and the changes in the family structure (PNUD 2024; Fuentes et al., 2024), challenge the current pastoral models and, along with this, demand the renewal of traditional catechetical practices. These factors, together with the call of the Episcopal Conference of Chile to renew catechesis (CECH, 2023) and the invitation of Pope Francis to develop a kerygmatic and mystagogical catechesis (*Evangelii Gaudium*), make the renewal of catechesis an urgent task in order to respond effectively to the new contexts (Living and Learning Community Education, 2019).

This article reports the results of the project “Characteristics of best practices of sacramental catechesis in Catholic schools and coherence with the mission of the Catholic school”. This study seeks to be an innovative contribution to the challenges faced by catechesis in Catholic schools in Chile, in a context of socio-cultural and ecclesial transformations. It thus identifies the catechetical and pedagogical dimensions and elements in accordance with the current *Directory for Catechesis* (2020), proposing a replicable model that reinforces the identity of Catholic schools as ecclesial, inclusive and synodal spaces.

Considering this context, we sought, on one hand, to identify common elements of best sacramental catechetical practices in Catholic schools and, on the other hand, to analyze the criteria that allow us to classify school catechetical practices as successful. The research therefore adopted a qualitative approach to explore the best sacramental catechetical practices through semi-structured interviews, both

individual and group (focus groups), with those responsible for catechesis and teams of catechists in each school.

The relevance of the study lies in the need to develop catechetical models that respond effectively to contemporary challenges in Catholic schools in Chile. In line with the *Pastoral Guidelines 2023-2026*, this research offers valuable tools for pastoral agents, catechists and educators, strengthening their work of accompanying children and young people in their faith journey. By identifying and analyzing the best practices, the project promotes the renewal of catechesis in Chile, fostering a formation that integrates faith with culture and the daily life of students. This proposal of good practices in sacramental catechesis provides a significant resource to create a more inclusive catechesis, contextualized and aligned with the synodal spirit, thus ensuring its relevance and effectiveness in the current school context.

The article is structured in five sections. First, it develops the theoretical and conceptual background regarding the pedagogical and pastoral theological elements; then, it describes the research methodology considering the approach, the data collection strategies and the analysis. Thirdly, the results are presented in two areas: best practices of school catechesis in its dimensions of management, use of spaces, method/didactics, and a second section referring to the criteria for the consideration of best practices. The fourth section presents the discussion, articulating the results with the conceptual theoretical background of the research; and finally, the conclusion is presented.

1. Conceptual theoretical background

Given the length of this article, this section only presents the theoretical and conceptual background considered necessary to understand the study and the discussion of the results, specifically: the identity of the Catholic School, the concept of best practices and the documents used to determine the five criteria of best practices.

1.1. Identity of the Catholic School

The Catholic School, besides being an academic space, is also a place of evangelization where students are formed in a Christian vision of life (DC, 2020). In this sense, the Catholic School is defined as a space of mission and testimony, in which evangelical values are sought to permeate all dimensions of education (Vicariate for Education, 2020). Therefore, it has the responsibility to foster an environment where faith is lived by integrating Christian values in daily life and interpersonal relationships (DC, 2020). Thus, the Catholic School becomes a place that promotes the integral growth of the students, who are accompanied not only in their intellectual development, but also in their spiritual and human dimension, in coherence with the school's Institutional Educational Project (IEP). In this way, the Catholic school is a true "ecclesial subject" (DC, 2020, #311), because it makes visible the mission of the Church in the formal educational context, thus ratifying its identity and mission (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997).

1.2. Best practices

The concept of *best practices* refers to a set of actions, methods and approaches that, based on empirical evidence and expert consensus, have proven to be highly effective in achieving specific objectives

in various fields. Consequently, these practices, resulting from a critical analysis of successful and unsuccessful experiences, are consolidated as benchmarks that promote excellence and continuous learning (Aparicio, 2023).

As in any other teaching-learning process, for Christian initiation catechesis, the identification and application of best practices is fundamental, because it allows the design of meaningful experiences that encourage faith and Christian life in the catechized. In this sense, Freire's words when he points out that educational practice has the quality of "not being able to be neutral" (Freire, 2012, p. 45) continue to be inspiring, because everything that is done in catechesis responds to an ecclesial and theological paradigm.

The implementation of best practices in school catechesis can be manifested in various ways, whether in methods, didactics, approach to content, planning of itineraries, preparation of materials, evaluation of learning, profile of the catechist, among others (Véliz and Gutiérrez, 2021). The challenge is to identify which theoretical and practical elements allow catechesis to be more than a mere transmission of knowledge, but a space for dialogue, encounter and joint construction of faith.

1.3. Documents that guide catechetical practice

Among the numerous documents concerning catechesis, two stand out for their importance: the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997) and the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020). They both provide the fundamental theological-pastoral principles and orientations relevant to the praxis of catechesis in our time (Martin, 2021). The essential

dimensions that these documents address, which are of particular interest for this research refer to the identity, purpose, tasks and sources of catechesis. The texts also deal with the process of catechesis, which includes the pedagogy of faith, methodology and the impact on people's lives. Last but not least, they develop the relevant role of the catechist and the community in the different cultural scenarios where the inculturation of the faith takes place.

1.4. Criteria for best catechetical practices

In the scope of this study, a criterion is understood as a principle, norm or standard for judging, evaluating or making decisions about some matter, object or situation (Pérez et al., 2017). In the case of catechesis, it would be a frame of reference that allows us to determine if it complies with what is indicated by the catechetical directories. It is true that these documents do not speak of criteria; however, inspired by them, we can establish five, which are explained synthetically below.

1st criterion. Respect for the identity of catechesis.

Catechesis is a fundamental action of the Church aimed at guiding the faithful in the maturing of their faith and in a profound encounter with Christ. This identity has a strong link with the Church's missionary mandate, which calls all believers to live, share and bear witness to the Gospel in every context and time (DGC, 1997; DC, 2020). In Catholic schools, sacramental catechesis takes on special relevance, since it is about accompanying children and young people in their journey of Christian initiation (Vicariate for Education, 2023). In these spaces, catechesis not only transmits doctrinal knowledge, but also seeks that each catechist

develops a personal and living relationship with Christ, who is the center of Christian faith and life. We can allude here to a Trinitarian Christocentrism, which consists in centering catechesis on Christ as the revelation of God and as the path to communion with the Trinity (DGC, 1997). This approach allows catechized to find in Jesus the model and guide for their Christian life (*Christus vivit*).

Catechesis in the Catholic School seeks to educate in Christian life, promoting values and virtues that orient children and young people towards a life consistent with the Gospel (DGC, 1997). Likewise, catechesis has the task of initiating into prayer and liturgy, helping to understand and live deeply the sacraments of initiation and the liturgical moments of the Church (DC, 2020). Finally, through community life in the school, catechesis teaches students to live in fraternity, forming an active part of a community of faith and committing them to the values of the Gospel (González, 2023).

2nd criterion. Coherence, organization and hierarchy of the contents of the catechesis

It is essential that catechesis maintain a unity and organic structure in its contents, so that catechized can integrate the different aspects of the faith and perceive the Christian message as a coherent and hierarchical whole, which is directly related to their personal and community experience (DGC, 1997; DC, 2020).

Catechesis fosters the initial conversion and the following of Jesus, a task that is centered on the proclamation of the kerygma (EG), the core of the Christian message that invites to a personal and transforming encounter with Christ (DC, 2020).

3rd criterion. Valorization of the plurality of methods and experiences in catechesis

One of the main methodological sources is the pedagogy of God, which inspires catechists to respect and accompany the personal faith processes of each catechized person, in a dynamic of acceptance and understanding (DGC, 1997). It is also important that catechists use appropriate language and means to make catechesis understandable and attractive (Sartor, 2016). In this sense, for example, the use of digital tools can be useful to capture the attention of the catechized, communicating the message of faith in an accessible and meaningful way (DC, 2020). Teaching methodologies should include both the inductive method, which starts from the personal and daily experience of the catechized, and the deductive method, which helps to deepen the doctrine and principles of the faith, facilitating meaningful learning that allows children and young people to relate to the person of Christ (DGC, 1997). Therefore, the methodologies used in school catechesis should be adapted to the particularities of children and youth, in addition to considering the characteristics of the educational environment itself (Acha, 2000).

4th criterion. Adaptation and inculturation of catechesis in the stages of life

In order to respond to the stages and circumstances of the students, as well as to pastoral needs, catechesis in the school setting takes different forms. In this sense, we can speak of an inculturation that implies the adaptation of catechetical content and methods to the cultural reality of each school (CD, 2020).

One of the main ways to carry out this task is the catechesis of initiation, which aims to prepare children and young people for the reception of the

sacraments: baptism, eucharist and confirmation (CD, 2020). This catechesis is particularly important in Catholic schools, where it is expected that students, by experiencing this formative process, will be fully inserted into Christian life (Del Campo, 2007). Another relevant form of catechesis is permanent catechesis, which accompanies all members of the educational community in their growth in faith throughout their school life.

5th criterion. The catechist as a living witness to the faith

In the school context, the catechist is an essential figure, because he/she goes beyond the simple transmission of contents. His or her mission is to be a witness, guide and model for catechized students in their spiritual growth (DGC, 1997). As a teacher, religious or trained lay person, he/she lives his/her catechetical vocation as a service to the educational community. To assume this mission, the catechist needs to receive an integral formation that includes the doctrine of the Church as well as pedagogical and human sciences, so that he/she is prepared to respond to the contextual challenges of children and the younger ones (DC, 2020). In addition, the catechist needs to learn skills related to accompaniment and listening, since his or her role involves walking with children and the young in their doubts and search for meaning, which are inherent to their stage of life (DGC, 1997).

2. Methodology

“Behold, the Kingdom of God is already among you” (Lk 17:21). This text is very inspiring when it comes to making visible the good catechetical practices that already exist in schools. Therefore, firstly, we have proceeded to analyze the good practices recognized

by school catechists and, secondly, to verify if there is coherence between these elements and what is proposed by the directories for catechesis.

To achieve these objectives, the qualitative methodology is used from the constructivist paradigm, through a non-experimental design of exploratory and phenomenological character; this type of methodology is chosen because it seeks an approach to the real world studied, in this case, the best practices of catechesis and, as a result, to discover new knowledge and perspectives (Fernandez and Vela, 2021). The focus group technique was selected because it allows participants to interact with each other through the moderation of a facilitator who leads the dialogue and stimulates equal participation (Rodas and Pacheco, 2020). At the same time, the in-depth interview is chosen so that the interviewees can explain themselves in an atmosphere of trust; this also allows, on many occasions, the information provided to exceed the objectives of the study, allowing other topics to emerge as a research corollary (Martínez, 2021). In both techniques, the participants become true builders of knowledge (Aguirre-García and Jaramillo, 2012).

The interview questions are formulated in coherence with the objectives of the research, allowing to lead to more specific questions, namely: what are the best practices of sacramental catechesis in your institution and what would be, in your opinion, the criteria to determine that these are best practices?

Through contacts provided by the Education Department of the Episcopal Conference of Chile, we requested permission to access eleven schools. Since this is a qualitative research, the sample was chosen to be representative; therefore, five schools from the ecclesiastical zone of the Archdiocese of

Santiago were selected, along with six others from different dioceses across the country, covering the south and the north. In turn, six schools are confessional and six are Catholic oriented.

The first approach was made with the person in charge of pastoral ministry at the school, who provided the name of the catechesis coordinator, and this, in turn, summoned the school's catechists. A day and time were agreed upon to be present at the school and an in-depth individual interview was conducted with the person in charge of catechesis and a group interview (focus group) with the catechist team of the school. In the educational context, those responsible for catechesis in the schools are mostly teachers of Religion; many of them are part of the management teams and have completed postgraduate studies. In turn, the participating catechists are generally teachers (of Religion and other disciplines), nuns, education assistants, former students and parents who have developed their pastoral life in school contexts and, in some cases, have also had experience of catechesis in their parishes. Eleven in-depth interviews and nine discussion groups were conducted, in which a total of 52 people over 18 years of age participated.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed, respecting the ethical parameters of the research and requesting informed consent from the participants, as well as a letter of authorization for the study signed by the school principal. The audio of the interviews was kept until they were written down and then deleted; the written narratives have only alphabetical and numerical codes to protect the anonymity of the schools and the participants. The research did not involve any danger for the participants and the benefits are related to the value of the shared experiences and an input sent

to all of them in which some best practices⁴ are synthesized.

In order to analyze the results, the comparison method was used, in articulation with the theoretical and conceptual background (Torres, 2011). This consisted in proceeding to the content analysis of the narratives, identifying the criteria and elements that, according to the interviewees, constitute best sacramental catechetical practices. Then, a first simple correlation of common elements among the best practices studied was made, recognizing convergences and differences in the various educational establishments, to conclude with a proposed list of common elements and a second one with the theoretical and conceptual criteria. No software was used in the analysis to process the information, as a manual analysis was chosen instead.

Finally, even considering that this was a qualitative research and that the results are not normative, the findings were shared with the participants and with the Episcopal Conference of Chile.

3. Results

The results of the research are organized in two sections. The first seeks to identify common elements of best practices of sacramental catechesis in Catholic schools and the second develops the criteria for classifying school catechetical practices as successful.

The presentation of the results was done according to the method of comparison and some significant narratives were recorded, which are identified with

the acronyms E (school no.) RC, interview with the person in charge of catechesis and EG (school no.), C (participant no.) corresponding to group interview; each school has been assigned a random number and also the catechists (C) who participated in the discussion groups, to safeguard anonymity.

3.1. Best practices in school catechesis

According to the narratives, best practices in school catechesis can be organized into four criteria: a pastoral itinerary, good use of space, didactics and methodologies.

3.1.1. Catechesis as part of a pastoral itinerary

From the analysis of the narratives of the participants, it is concluded that sacramental catechesis is part of a broad evangelizing process that is articulated within the school's pastoral itinerary, in which the personal encounter with Christ is favored and faith is not presupposed. Some of the narratives were the following:

We do not do pastoral ministry just because the children are going to make their first communion, but we follow up because the movement [school pastoral ministry], which starts in first grade, has a guideline to follow: the children start with a sense of community, then, in fourth and fifth grade, we make the sacrament, but we continue working on our sense of community until they graduate. (EG1 C1 p. 8)

Here we have a common thread, an itinerary, it is a community that grows. We do not celebrate the sacraments as events, but we seek a constant presence of God in our life. So, the kids are in missionary childhood, pre-juvenile Eucharistic catechesis and youth pastoral, where they prepare for Confirmation. (E2 RC, p. 4)

⁴ See the following information on the web: <https://boosco.org/www/download/buenas-practicas-catequesis-sacramental/>

We can evidence that best sacramental catechetical practices are inserted in the pastoral plan of the school and are possible due to the characteristics of educational institutions where children, adolescents and parents and guardians stay for years. Another element that appears clearly is that these educational establishments have teachers of Religion and other specialties with pastoral experience, which confirms that pedagogical and psychological training is fundamental for catechetical work (Borello, 2023).

Furthermore, catechesis, when managed by a pastoral coordinator, offers the possibility of follow-up, impact evaluation, coordination with the pastoral ministry as a whole and with other areas of school life.

3.1.2. Best practices in the use of spaces

The participants in the interviews identified as a good practice the use of spaces other than the classroom, and when they must remain in the classroom, to reorganize the furniture and the distribution of the space. This allows the students to experience a dynamic different from the usual school setting, fostering an environment conducive to the catechetical process that enables community encounter and growth in faith. Some of the narratives were the following:

It has been very useful for me to break the pattern, to make semicircles, change the layout of the room (...), because if it looks like a class, you lose them. (EG10 C6, p. 10)

We did the workshop in the spirituality center, and it was a place where there is grass, it is very big, and we each had our own place [children, young people and parents]. They were impressed by the change of place and being in a quiet environment. (E10 RC, p. 5)

As can be observed in the narratives, the use of space is very important in order not to fall into schooling. In addition, other spaces such as the chapel, not arranged in a traditional way but adapted to the age of the catechized children, are places that allow a better development of catechesis.

3.1.3. Best didactic⁵ practices

For the catechists interviewed, the didactic resource is fundamental. In this regard, a female coordinator affirms:

We must be super creative for the evangelization, because without creativity we went to B⁶. So, we have to be super creative to be able to take the gospel to people who are going to hear it for the first time. (E2 RC, p. 6)

In the pursuit of meaningful didactics for the catechists, the narratives refer to the use of the text in catechesis, which although some years ago was an indisputable resource, today it is more for the catechists and not for the catechized. In general, the catechists use material they have prepared themselves, or else they use subsidies created by the diocese or available on the Internet. In one of the schools, a textbook is not used with children.

At school, the children are all day long with guides, with sheets of paper, so the subject is presented to them in a more experiential way (...) It is so that they understand that I go

5 Regarding the didactics discovered in the schools, a synthesis is made in the report "Best practices of sacramental catechesis", shared with the participating schools and uploaded to the Boosco platform for its socialization: Cabrera, H. and Basualto, L. (2024). Best practices of sacramental catechesis. <https://boosco.org/www/download/buenas-practicas-catequesis-sacramental/>

6 Slang that refers to the second division of Chilean soccer called Primera B. It alludes to "failure of any kind of any person or group that has not achieved its objective". (Chilean Dictionary, 2024, voice: Going to the B).

to catechesis, I do not go with my case, my notebook, I go to catechesis; so, I believe that these practices allow the child, in the context of school, to make the difference between catechesis and classes. (E1 RC p. 6)

The didactics are diverse. Among the most valued are those related to liturgy and spirituality, such as: catechetical Eucharistic celebrations, that is, explained, with much participation of the catechized students; prayer in an experiential way, to learn to pray conversing with God throughout daily life; the delivery of signs that highlight the itinerary of the catechesis; the explanation of liturgical signs through meaningful experiences; the participation in processions and the preparation of songs to animate liturgical celebrations. Some narratives that express this diversity of didactics mentioned:

In the parents' catechesis meetings, we try to have a Eucharist once a month, but a catechetical Eucharist, which are very explanatory Masses, because they are not people who go to Mass. For some of them, it is the first time they go to mass in their lives. (E2 RC, p. 3)

[We do] the delivery of the Our Father, the Creed, the altar candle, the New Testament. We also believe that it is very positive, because the family is also much more connected to the mass. (E4 RC, p. 5)

Other resources mentioned have to do with the dynamics of games and songs, the dialogue based on ludic strategies, the use of audiovisual media, the rediscovery of classic games, written narratives (letters, logs or life diaries), sign language, drawings and the construction of small sculptures.

They are taught gestures: Mary, Jesus, God. Then, the children start making these gestures and later they also want to learn new ways of

communicating through sign language. (EG2 C2, p. 2)

The parents work based on what the children have sent them, a letter or something they wrote to them in relation to the topic [about forgiveness]. And then, the parents also give something to their children that I later share with them in the next meeting. (EG1 C1 p. 2)

We are using QR codes, according to the topic we are teaching (...) There is a video that helps to develop the topic, or a crossword puzzle, but it is online, they must do it on their cell phone. (E5 RC, p. 3)

The school catechists referred to didactics that strengthen community life, such as, for example, sharing food; organizing processions, days and spiritual retreats; introducing missionary experiences and solidarity services into the catechetical itinerary.

[On the day of catechesis] the little ones organize their picnic; everyone brings their blanket to share the food they have brought. (EG6 C1, p. 3)

With Confirmation we went to Foundation Las Rosas, we went to see the elderly people. Well, the kids were scared at first, but then they didn't want to leave, because they started playing bingo, and both adults and young people enjoyed it. (EG4 C2, p. 4)

Finally, the experience of testimonies by significant people stands out, because they invite to work on their life project and to discern their vocation.

3.1.4. Underlying methodological best practices

From the narratives of the participants, it is possible to infer some methodologies used in catechesis. In general, the methods used are inductive, which allows them to touch the reality and experience of

the catechized. To refer to this way of approaching catechesis, they use the concept of “descent”:

The idea is making the “descent” to what I live daily. For example, the Eucharist. That is, to bring it down to the fact that they are at a table sharing with their loved ones, to be like the simile of when we have an afternoon snack with our family, to when we are at the Eucharist sharing the body of Christ with others. (EG1 C1 p. 4)

It is also used the experiential or life-based method, that is, to encourage the catechized to verbalize their life experiences and in this way relate them to the biblical and magisterial teachings.

We explained to them a little about the topic we had to deal with at that moment, but then we asked them a little about the living experience. How they lived it, what was for them, a little bit to bring them down to their reality. (E3 RC, p. 2)

Another method used is the inverted classroom, where the catechized students become active subjects of the catechesis, generating didactic activities, making decisions regarding the contents and liturgical actions. This procedure encourages autonomy and teamwork, with the purpose of forging a mature faith, which is expressed in this testimony:

We are doing community prayer, but we are also delegating it afterwards; for example, one week they volunteer; it is your turn to prepare the prayer for the beginning of the meeting; it is your turn to prepare the final prayer. (EG1 C1 p. 2)

3.2. Criteria to consider best practices

In this section we analyze the narratives that allow us to consider a methodology or didactic as best

practice. In this regard, in practically all the schools, attendance was mentioned first.

What helps us to know that the catechesis is going well is that the students receive the sacrament and the number of participations in parent-child catechesis. (E7 RC, p. 3)

The previous criterion is directly related to participation and interest:

When you see that they are delighted with the subject, when you see that they participate. (E5 RC, p. 5)

The participants also point out that welcoming, listening and empathy are best practices, since they are not always present in other school instances; these attitudes are considered to be what makes the difference between classes and catechesis.

There are things that do not happen in the classroom: if we have to cry, we cry; if we have to talk, we talk; if we have to play, we play; if there is no time to complete the planned topic [of catechesis], there is no problem, because it is focused on another situation and we have the opportunity to readjust ourselves so that the children do not miss out on the topics. (EG6 C1, p. 5)

At the same time, the element of community growth in faith is an aspect that is highlighted:

The in-person meeting helps to build a group, helps to build a community, and little by little the parents discover a space where they can talk about other things and can relax and unwind. (EG10 C3, p. 5)

On the other hand, the interviewees point out that the catechized themselves recognize when it is a best practice, because they give their feedback on the catechetical process.

[Once, the priest that was conducting the mass, asked], who is in catechesis? [a girl responded] I am in catechesis, but we don't learn anything. All we do is fill in things and we don't learn anything. It's the same as a class. For us it was an eye-opener. And then we started to say, let's see, here is something that is happening, that the children are feeling that it is just another class out of all the classes they have had during the day: [catechesis] is not doing something meaningful. (E1 RC p. 7)

Finally, by evaluating the process, the narratives refer to the fact that catechesis has been a best practice when there is continuity and insertion in the pastoral proposal of the school, whether as a student, alumni or parent.

In fact, we have a former student who comes to help us. (EG6 C1, p. 4-5).

Most of those who are catechists are currently parents. (E10 RC, p. 6).

4. Discussion

To discuss the results of the research, the material was organized based on the criteria presented in the conceptual theoretical background. This procedure made it possible to identify coincidences and differences in the practices observed in relation to the best catechetical practices proposed by the theory. The following is an analysis of each of the established criteria.

4.1. Respect for the identity of catechesis

The theoretical framework points out that catechesis must be part of a broad and structured pastoral itinerary, conceived as a continuous process of maturing in the faith, linked to the kerygma and the

missionary mandate of the Church (DGC, 1997; DC, 2020). This definition is significantly reflected in the results, which show that Catholic schools structure catechesis as a pastoral journey that transcends sacramental preparation. The participants' narratives show that catechesis is designed to accompany students from their entry to the culmination of their school life, including pastoral activities before and after the reception of the sacraments.

4.2. Coherence, organization and hierarchy of catechetical content

The theoretical framework proposes that the contents of catechesis should be coherent and organic, so that the Christian message is perceived in an integral and progressive way. The results of the research confirm this perspective.

The narratives show that, in practice, a logical sequence of contents is sought. However, there is a notable difference in the adaptation of the contents to the reality of each educational institution, depending largely on the availability of human and material resources, the experience of the pastoral teams and the particularities of each school community. This reality poses the challenge of contextualization and flexibility in the application of the contents.

4.3. Valorization of the plurality of methods and experience in catechesis

The theoretical framework proposes a pedagogy of faith that values the diversity of methods and experiences. This approach finds a strong correspondence in the results, which highlight the creative strategies employed by catechists to differentiate catechesis from school dynamics. The research shows that inductive methods, participatory experiences, life narratives and visual

and digital resources (videos, interactive games and QR codes) are used.

The use of differentiated spaces is another outstanding practice, as catechists break with the traditional layout of classrooms to create environments more conducive to the experience of faith. Semi-circles, chapel meetings, courtyards and spirituality centers are used, allowing catechists to enter a dynamic different from that of the conventional classroom.

However, a disparity is observed in the application of this plurality of methods. While some schools succeed in developing an experiential and differentiated catechesis, in others the methods used are still anchored in a school-based logic, with excessive use of texts and cards, which the catechized students themselves perceive as an extension of the school day.

4.4. Adaptation and inculturation of catechesis in the stages of life

The theoretical framework proposes that catechesis should be incarnated in the cultural and social reality of the catechized, promoting the inculturation of faith. This perspective is echoed in the results, which show how catechetical teams adapt methodologies to the concrete contexts of the schools. The reports reflect an effort to use cultural and pedagogical elements that are significant for the students, such as the incorporation of games, songs, experiential dynamics and the participation of parents and guardians in the meetings.

However, a difference is observed regarding the depth of inculturation. While the theoretical framework emphasizes the need for deep inculturation, the results suggest that, in practice, adaptation is oriented more towards pedagogical accessibility

than cultural integration. That is to say, catechists succeed in adapting teaching methods, but an explicit reflection on the cultural elements proper to the educational community is not always perceived. This difference highlights the need for more training in inculturation on the part of catechetical agents.

4.5. The catechist as a living witness of the faith

The theoretical framework stresses that the catechist should not only teach but also witness faith through their life. The results of the research do not explicitly address this criterion, since the interviewees did not make direct mention of it. However, the analysis of the narratives allows us to infer that the life testimony of the catechists is manifested in their dedication and devotion, as well as in the positive impact they have on the students. The narratives of the catechized and guardians suggest that the figure of the catechist is valued not only for his or her knowledge, but also for his or her closeness and empathy.

The testimony of the catechist is also evident in the continuity of the catechetical mission, through the active participation of former students and parents who become catechists. This fact, highlighted in the results, allows us to observe an intergenerational dynamic that enriches the educational community and reinforces the sense of belonging and commitment to the evangelizing mission.

4.6. New criteria

In addition to the five-criterion proposed in the theoretical framework, the research results highlight the importance of other practical elements that deserve to be considered as additional best practice criteria. These emerging criteria include:

- Catechized students feedback. Students not only actively participate but also evaluate the catechesis spontaneously and critically. The participants' accounts show that feedback from catechists influences the improvement of catechetical practice. For example, students' criticisms of the schooling of catechesis led the teams to rethink their methods and approaches.
- Welcoming and creating a safe environment. Catechesis differs from school logic by the climate of welcome, listening and empathy that is generated during the meetings. This aspect is frequently mentioned by the interviewees, who emphasize that the willingness to listen and welcome allows the students to express themselves freely, even in moments of emotional crisis.
- The participation of parents and former students. The results highlight the relevance of the integration of parents and former students into catechetical dynamics. This fact translates into a relationship of co-responsibility between the family and the educational community, which strengthens the formative process and generates an experience of an active ecclesial community. This suggests the need to update the theoretical documents to include this dimension.
- Continuous evaluation of practices. Pastoral teams carry out formative evaluations during the catechetical process. This evaluation is not only based on attendance, but on the active participation and commitment of the students and their families. The practice of continuous evaluation allows for immediate adjustment of content and methods, enhancing flexibility and contextual adaptation.

The discussion of the results shows a high correspondence between the theoretical criteria of best catechetical practices and the practices observed in Catholic schools. However, important differences are identified that point to the need for greater flexibility and contextual adaptation in the application of the theory. The emerging criteria enrich the theoretical perspective and underscore the importance of feedback, welcoming and intergenerational participation in school catechesis.

Conclusion

The objectives of this work were to identify the common elements of best catechetical practices in the school context and to determine the criteria that allow classifying them as such; secondly, to verify if they responded to the principles or criteria established by the directories (1997 and 2020).

The results and their analysis show a high correspondence between the principles established in the theoretical framework and the characteristics of best practices of sacramental catechesis observed in Catholic schools in Chile. This coherence confirms that school catechesis is not reduced to the transmission of doctrinal knowledge but is constituted as an integral formative process that accompanies students in their faith journey, fostering their personal and community encounter with Christ. The common elements identified - such as the integration of catechesis into a pastoral itinerary, the use of meaningful spaces, the application of creative and participatory methodologies, and the experience of a fraternal welcome - reveal consistency with the ideal of a living, communitarian and inculturated catechesis in the school context.

Nevertheless, the comparison between theory and practice reveals certain tensions and challenges. Practice reveals the need for greater contextualization of content, deeper cultural adaptation and flexibility in the implementation of the pastoral itinerary. Significantly, valuable practices emerge that were not explicitly considered in the conceptual theoretical background, such as the participatory evaluation of the catechized students, the active participation of former students and parents in the catechetical process, and the empathetic welcome during the meetings. These practices stand out for their capacity to strengthen the faith community and enrich the formation process, making catechesis a space for intergenerational communion and meaningful encounters.

This research reaffirms the importance of the theoretical framework proposed by the Church to guide school catechesis, emphasizing respect for the identity of catechesis in the Catholic school. At the same time, it invites a critical reflection on the adaptation and application of this framework in real educational contexts. This model, in addition to responding to the formative needs of the students, is aligned with the evangelizing mission of the Church and with the Institutional Educational Project (IEP) of each school. Thus, the school sacramental catechesis is projected not only as a formative space, but as a true itinerary of shared faith, contributing to the formation of children and young people committed to the faith and to a Church on the way out, according to the principles of a synodal and communitarian pedagogy.

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