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“God’s dream for us”: Transforming RE learning through Scripture

When Karen Bergin took up principalship at St Peter’s Catholic Primary School in Southwest Sunshine, VIC, she saw possibilities to enrich the school’s Catholic identity.

One of her priorities was to ensure that Religion Education engages students in a more dynamic way. Three years on, students are now passionate about learning in RE.

A grade 5/6 student said they enjoyed “We investigate and know the question in and out. We search deep. It is harder work and a lot more difficult, but it’s interesting. We get to do projects and creative things, and we’re not learning the same thing every year,” the student said.

One of the key elements of this transformation has been the use of a new model for engaging students with Scripture, which is the result of a collaboration between Scripture scholars from the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium), and the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, Australian Catholic University (ACU).

“I like to focus on stories that inspire you. I try to act like them and it makes you a better person and close to God,” one student said.

The learning approach is inspired by the work of Professor Reimund Bieringer, who has developed a model for interpreting the three different worlds of a scriptural text (past, present, and future) and how these texts allow people to discern God’s dream for humanity.

The approach is resonating even with the youngest students, with a year 1/2 student observing: “God’s dream is for us to use our words and make good choices”.

The learning is not only limited to the students. The RE classroom is also a place where teachers learn with and from the students.

“The students’ own wonderings and insights have enriched and strengthened my own faith,” said RE teacher Grace Frazzica.

Structured around professional learning teams, the RE teachers’ learning is further enriched when they too use the same approach to decipher Scripture with colleagues.

It is this dialogical momentum that has contributed to the flourishing of St Peter’s learning environment. “We use different ways of learning, depending on our resources. There are more fun projects. Religion is more about huge projects, more variety and is less basic than before ... and it’s great,” said a year 5/6 student.

Photo credit: Karen Bergin.

Learning with and from each other. Year six students from St Peter’s – Grace, Crsyta, John, Johnathon, Stipe and Peter – with Prof Reimund Bieringer (KU Leuven), Dr Emmanuel Nathan (ACU), Ms. Janine Luttick (St Peter’s) and Ide Garvey (St Peter’s).

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