This Edition

Religious Education

Cross Curriculum Pastoral Care

Reachout Manila

Heads Retreats

Experiri is a quarterly newsletter presenting stories of innovation in school ministry from Australia and beyond. Each edition will provide three or four single page profiles of innovative strategies that have been developed in response to challenges or emerging issues for chaplains or others in the school, including Heads and Religious Educators. If you are interested in contributing to Experiri see our contact information below.

Production and Editing: Stephen Harrison, Anglican Schools Commission - Diocese of Brisbane

projects@ascqld.org.au +617 3835 2288
Innovation #1

Contributor:
The Reverend Glenn Loughrey
Chaplain - Lindisfarne AGS
Grafton Diocese
gloughrey@lindisfarne.nsw.edu.au

“a school and theological school partnership breathing new life into religious education”

What was the need or challenge being addressed?

A coordinated and appropriate religious education program which allowed students to explore the Christian faith and Anglicanism, and reconcile it with their ordinary experience was required. This need was identified by a religion and spirituality survey across years 5-12. One of the identified issues was that students consistently showed both a simplistic and instrumental understanding of faith of any form.

What was the response to the need?

A number of options were investigated before discussions were had with Trinity College Theological School, Melbourne. It was agreed to trial and adapt the Certificate in Theology and Ministry for use within the school environment for years 7-10. Teachers were invited to offer to teach this course, for which they would be appropriately recognised by the College. Two units of the course were to be taught each year over the period of four years, gaining the students an appropriate certificate. Each session of a unit is taught over two weeks, including chapel, and there is an appropriate learning task to be completed each semester. The learning task is designed to connect the study material to the life experience of the student, thus grounding the material in the real world for them.

What was the impact?

Teachers eagerly volunteered to teach the course and have found it both challenging and inspiring. It allows them to connect the material to the curriculum and to show how the RE material relates to the student’s school life. The students have embraced the program and enjoyed talking about what their life experience has been, engaging in debate and discussion, and have gained a greater respect and understanding of the Bible and its relevance for their life.

The program is being introduced gradually. Last year all students in years 7-10 completed units 1 and 2. This year’s, years 7 will do so while the rest of the year levels will complete units 3 and 4. The program will be fully implemented by the end of 4 years. At the same time approximately seven teachers will have completed the course due to their involvement as teachers and leaders, and others would have completed various units.

What were the greatest challenges?

To be very honest, there have been no real challenges. By carrying out the survey (which is being repeated this year) we were able to show the need for the program, and both staff and students have accepted the decision without any real concerns. There was a muffled grumble about the learning tasks (assessments) as RE has always been seen as a ‘minimum effort’ subject. It is, and always will be, a work in progress and will evolve according to the staff and students involved.
Innovation #2

Contributor:
Deanne Hamilton
Coordinator of Mission and Community Development—Canterbury College
Brisbane Diocese
d.hamilton@canterbury.qld.edu.au

“working across the curriculum can deliver powerful pastoral care experiences for students”

What was the need or challenge being addressed?

Providing a room full of energetic and spirited Middle schoolers with engaging learning experiences can be a challenge at the best of times! We know teenagers have a great deal to offer our community but we also know through current research that they are certainly vulnerable to engaging in negative behaviors if they don’t feel connected - to themselves, each other, family and community. What could we do in our pastoral care program in year 8 to ensure this engagement and this connection was felt by our students?

What was the response to the need?

The answer was to align our Spiritual Development course to the HPE curriculum with the linchpin being the values from our College Charter. The highly regarded ‘Rock and Water’ program is conducted during HPE lessons. Students are learning that with strength and intelligence they can calmly choose their actions and responses to difficult situations. The power of their choices is then further explored through Spiritual Development lessons. Having the strength to stand by your choices and defend your decisions can be hard - the Bible stories and passages studied highlight to our students that they are not alone. A supportive curriculum and pastoral care team and year level coordinator, guides students through physical activities and carefully selected focus questions that bring together the experiences. These are then expressed in a reflective journal.

What was the impact?

Massive!!! Self-confidence, self-awareness and an obvious increase in resilience when dealing with stressful and challenging situations has been evident in the cohort. The students are seeing why people value religion and are also understanding how the power of words and attitudes can bless or destroy. Considering what the Bible says is worth treasuring is powerful stuff for Middle School students - it’s even more powerful when they can really make a connection and relate the scripture to their own lives. Our Year 8 cohort has been provided with not just a rich experience but a program that feels real.

What were the greatest challenges?

Timetable and staffing are always difficult when attempting something ‘new’. We have been fortunate, through the support of senior leadership, to allocate staff to the program in a way that works to the strengths of the teachers and supports the needs of the students. It is certainly a ‘learn by doing’ process in this, our first year but our team communication is strong as is our vision for this program.
Innovation #3

Reachout
service
ABM
Manila
Perth
partnership
tangible

Contribution:
The Reverend David Lord
Chaplain - Peter Carnley Anglican Community School
Perth Diocese
dlord@pcacs.wa.edu.au

“mission trips or pilgrimages can be powerful life changing experiences for students”

What was the need or challenge being addressed?

Young people today want to have real and tangible opportunities to learn and grow. Through these tangible experiences, opportunities for growth emerge in a deepening understanding of themselves, of God and the world in which they live.

What was the response to the need?

The Western Australian Schools Commission decided to organise a pilgrimage for students in Anglican School Commission (ASC) schools. Reachout Manila was organised in partnership with ABM and implemented through the ASC directly with The Episcopal Diocese of The Central Philippines (EDCP). ASC Schools were invited to join the pilgrimage and five schools responded with the third pilgrimage to take place in July 2013 with a group of 40 pilgrims from the five schools travelling to Manila.

Reachout Manila is about meeting and spending time with people from Manila who are materially poor, in a very different culture and context to what our students would know and understand. As students learn to serve people, who from a western mindset can appear to have nothing, they will discover that materialism is not the best measure of what is important. The students work alongside the faith communities in Manila which are already reaching out to those in need and have opportunities to live their faith in very practical ways.

What was the impact?

All the people who participate in ‘Reachout Manila’ are significantly and deeply changed by the experience. Pilgrims talk of life-changing experiences that have them reassessing their values, goals and aspirations for life. With comments such as “I thought I understood poverty as I had seen it on the TV and computer, but now I have seen it face to face and realise it looks just like me”, and “teaching a young child their numbers and alphabet is so much more than you think, the child keeps it and makes it their treasure. Just giving a small bowl of rice to fill his cramping stomach gives him more than food, it gives hope and love and a sense of trust in you and the world.” This year we are taking six former pilgrims who are returning as Peer Support Leaders to assist the pilgrims on their journey.

What were the greatest challenges?

There were two main challenges. The first was ensuring that whatever we do in the Philippines is responding to the needs of the Filipino people and not responding out of our own needs. Secondly, finding volunteer service placements in Perth on their return which will continue to stretch and challenge the pilgrims to the same level they experienced overseas.
Innovation #4

Contributor:
The Right Reverend Geoff Smith
General Manager
Brisbane Diocese
gmoffice@anglicanbrisbane.org.au

“retreats can be used to help equip Principals to be the spiritual leaders in their schools”

What was the need or challenge being addressed?
The annual retreat for Heads of Anglican schools in Brisbane Diocese has been occurring for more than ten years. The retreat was run on fairly ‘traditional’ lines with lots of silence and addresses from the retreat conductor. There was a feeling among Heads that this style was not successful in addressing both their need for equipping as spiritual leaders in their schools and for collegiality.

What was the response to the need?
Both the style of the retreat and the style of the input were changed towards a conference format with the input focussed on helping the Heads in their role. Over the past three years the focus has featured - an overview of the New Testament, the ministry of Jesus, and an exploration of the history and nature of Anglicanism. The program now includes good opportunity for informal conversation and relaxation, corporate worship through morning and evening prayer and the Eucharist including reflections on the Bible readings by the heads on a roster basis, and formal ‘sessions’ for the input.

What was the impact?
The impact has been very positive. Attendance is very high (>90% of Heads), with the Heads appreciating the opportunity for rest, relaxation and learning. The retreat is an important strategy in achieving our vision for Anglican Schools in the Diocese of Brisbane. The Bishops recognise the importance of this retreat, and sessions in the last few years have been led by the Archbishops and Bishops. One of the aspects that the Heads value about the retreat is the opportunity to talk with one another on a personal and collegial level about issues relating to their school and role within it.

What were the greatest challenges?
The Heads were very positive about the transition from the start, and are consulted each year about the theme or focus for the following year, but the biggest challenge remains time: the very tight diaries of the Heads. We find most Heads very committed to the retreat so we determine dates very early.