

RE Digital Resources Development - Research/Professional Learning Project ... **Article 3**

Learner-centred approaches to technology-enabled learning can empower learners and leverage good learning experiences that would not otherwise have been possible. Technology also often offers valuable tools for other building blocks in effective learning environments, including personalisation, co-operative learning, managing formative assessment, and many inquiry-based methods.¹

(1) Recapping the aim of our collaborative research/learning project

Our aim is to assist the teaching/learning process by providing busy classroom Religious Education (RE) teachers with resources that engage the learner. By providing theologically and educationally sound digital RE resources for the classroom we hope to increase the time teachers have to focus on the learning of their students.

In this way we seek to augment the mandated RE programme, available to teachers on [Faith Alive](#), and make the learning process relevant and engaging for the 21st century classroom.

In attempting to achieve these aims we are committed to working with classroom RE teachers and Catholic school leaders to enhance daily RE teaching practice and daily RE student experience throughout the Diocese (and possibly beyond the Diocese of Christchurch).

We believe our research/professional learning project (RPLP) is very much in support of that which the Congregation for Catholic Education notes, in its 2014 *Instrumentum Laboris*, "[Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion](#)", as a vital component in teaching as an instrument for education:

Nowadays, the "way" in which students learn seems to be more important than "what" they learn, just like the way of teaching seems to be more important than its contents. Teaching that only promotes repetitive learning, without favouring students' active participation or sparking their curiosity, is not sufficiently challenging to elicit motivation. Learning through research and problem-solving develops different and more significant cognitive and mental abilities, whereby students do more than just receiving information, while also stimulating teamwork. However, the value of learning contents must not be underestimated. If the way students learn is relevant, the same applies to what they learn: teachers must know how to select the essential elements of cultural heritage that has accumulated over time and how to present them to students. This approach also applies to the study of the major questions mankind is facing and has faced in the past. Otherwise, the risk could be to provide a kind of teaching that is only focused on what seems to be useful now, because it is being required by contingent economic or social demands, forgetting what is indispensable for the human person.²

¹ *The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice*, Innovative Learning Environments Project, OECD Publications, 2010 <https://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/50300814.pdf>

² http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20140407_educare-oggi-e-domani_en.html

It is acknowledged that innovative teaching can be achieved without technology; that said, we are of the view that the combination of an effective teacher alongside the appropriate use of technology enhances innovation and student learning – the validity of this view is evidenced from the [student feedback](#) we received in the initial phase of our project. In such a situation the technology simply becomes a commonplace vehicle for teaching and the facilitation of student learning.

It is our collective thinking that will create innovative solutions, not any particular technology. That said, we acknowledge teacher thinking & technology, and we seek to harness both to give us opportunities in our teaching toolkits that did not exist previously.

(2) Parameters for this second phase of our collaborative research/professional learning project

The parameters of this second phase in our collaborative RPLP are as follows:

- we will attempt that which is achievable within the resources available;
- we will take ‘baby’ steps before we attempt to walk confidently;
- we will work with real teachers in real classrooms, with real students;
- if this second phase points to the fact that we are at least still on the right path then subsequent work must be sustainable;
- our resources will be provided with the aim of ensuring consistency in the delivery of the NZ Catholic Bishops’ (NZCBC) mandated RE curriculum throughout all schools in the Diocese, whilst also providing space for individual school and student personalisation;
- our resources seek to support teachers and schools in their desire to develop the knowledge, understanding and application of faith for young people;
- our resources will seek to provide authentic learning/faith experiences for students in our Catholic schools.

(3) Outline plan for this second phase of our collaborative research/professional learning project

The outline plan for the team’s work, in the second exploratory phase of our collaborative RPLP, was as follows:

- review the feedback we received from teachers and students involved in the first phase of our project;
- in light of the feedback, revise the online resources for the Church strand at Years 7 & 8;
- provide resources for both the Google and Microsoft 365 platforms (as well as pdfs for a paper-based platform);
- provide “how to” videos to assist teachers in copying the resources onto their school’s network, ready for use in their classroom;
- provide “how to” videos to ensure all technologies used in the resources are easily understood for teachers who may not have come across this particular technology;
- request, teachers across the Diocese to trial these resources in their classrooms and provide feedback and feedforward;
- use the [flipped learning](#) model to supplement teaching and content delivery, where a teacher deems it appropriate ([see the student feedback section in Article 2](#));
- demonstrate to students that questioning is a highly valued skill for the 21st century and that digging deeper, through questioning and challenging assumptions, is an important element of the RE classroom;
- provide opportunities for teachers to create project and inquiry based learning opportunities whilst ensuring appropriate achievement objectives and learning outcomes (success criteria) of the mandated RE curriculum are covered;
- seek to ensure that RE is the source that other curriculum areas spring from.

(4) So where do I find the online resources for the Church strand in Years 7 & 8?

Within this site you will find vocab quizzes, pre and post assessments and a range of activities to develop your students' knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith, as detailed and provided for in the NZ Catholic Bishops Conference's mandated primary RE curriculum.

This learning space is still being developed. *Undoubtedly there will be a few mistakes and errors.* We welcome receiving your feedback so that we might correct any such technical and/or content mistakes and errors.

Here is our [Primary RE Digital learning Space](#) (which includes a [student competition](#) section).

Here is the [Teacher Support Material](#) for our Primary RE Student Digital learning Space.

We will run a series of introductory "question & answer" workshops for those Years 7 & 8 RE teachers who are wishing to trial the draft material and have initial questions they would like to ask before they trail the draft resource in their classrooms.

We may not have answers for some questions but we will commit to finding answers as we progress through our trial!

There is absolutely no compulsion to attend the "question & answer" workshop opportunities.

The **dates, times and venues for the introductory "question & answer" workshops** are:

1. **St Francis of Assis Catholic School**, Mairehau (**Tuesday 2nd May 2017** from 3.30pm – 4.30pm)
2. **Our Lady of the Assumption School**, Hoon Hay (**Wednesday 3rd May 2017** from 3.30pm – 4.30pm)
3. **St Joseph's School, Timaru** (**Thursday 11th May 2017** from 3.30pm – 4.30pm)
4. **West Coast** – Rory Paterson (DP, St Patrick's school, Greymouth) will negotiate workshop date(s) and time(s) for St Mary's School, Hokitika & for the Years 7&8 RE teachers at St Patrick's School, Greymouth.

If you have ideas about what we could improve or add to this space and its learning tasks please let us know and please share your ideas and learning tasks with us ... this is a vital component of our collaborative RPLP.

We are pretty sure that teachers will have some learning tasks that are superior to our first attempts and we would welcome receiving these; in this way we can collaboratively and continuously improve our learning space 😊

Have fun with this draft material 😊 and we look forward to receiving your feedback and feedforward on our draft resources in order that we might strengthen and add to the most promising new directions our research project might uncover 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊

(5) Where to from here?

Rory, Jeremy, Whitney, Cushla and I will gather together in Term 4 (2017) to review and reflect upon the feedback we receive.

If there is evidence that this structure and this process and these types of online resources provide an option that assists RE teaching and enriches student learning in RE, and we are at least heading in the right direction, albeit that we need to continually learn from the classroom feedback and refine and add to the bank of digital resources and online approaches, we would continue with our RPLP.

If we do continue into a third phase of our RPLP we would look to crowd source other voices and faces from teachers and students (and priests/bishop) throughout the Diocese to be the voices and faces of our knowledge/content input videos.

If we do continue we would definitely be sharing our learning and this structure and this collaborative process with the National Centre for Religious Studies (NCRS), and The Catholic Institute (TCI), and the NZCBC.

In this way, if our structure and process proves to have validity and “legs” we (i.e. *RE teachers and administrators throughout the various Dioceses of New Zealand*) could collaboratively crowd source and take responsibility for particular strands and thus relatively “quickly” provide such online resources to augment the teaching of our NZCBC-mandated primary (and Years 9 & 10?) RE curriculum.

At least that’s our big dream and vision ... reality might suggest otherwise!

Nevertheless, nothing great was ever produced by dreaming small; albeit that small steps are required to achieve big dreams!

Conclusion

Our RPLP aims to work with teachers and assist teachers in the creation of rich RE classroom learning environments.

Teaching today is no easy task! This is a time of great change and it is the only time we have to live in. In “Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion”, the Congregation for Catholic Education writers note the complexity of the teaching/learning process in this 21st century and great time demands upon teachers:

Professional competence is the necessary condition for openness to unleash its educational potential. A lot is being required of teachers and managers: they should have the ability to create, invent and manage learning environments that provide plentiful opportunities; they should be able to respect students’ different intelligences and guide them towards significant and profound learning; they should be able to accompany their students towards lofty and challenging goals, cherish high expectations for them, involve and connect students to each other and the world. Teachers must be able to pursue different goals simultaneously and face problem situations that require a high level of professionalism and preparation.³

³ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20140407_educare-oggi-e-domani_en.html

Our RPLP is an attempt to work with teachers and to assist teachers rise to this challenge in the prime curriculum area of our Catholic schools, RE. We look forward to our journey; a journey that Dr Seuss probably best describes:

*“You’ll get mixed up, of course, as you already know.
You’ll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go.
So be sure when you step.
Step with care and great tact
and remember that life’s
a great balancing act.
Just never forget to be dexterous and deft.
And never mix your right foot with your left”.*

Nevertheless we hope we are off to great places. We will let you know the places we end up as we continue our adventure.

Mike Nolan (*Manager*)
Catholic Education Office
Christchurch

Cushla O’Connor (*Primary RE Adviser*)
Catholic Education Office
Christchurch

Jeremy Cumming (*Secondary RE Adviser*)
Catholic Education Office
Christchurch

Rory Paterson (*Deputy Principal*)
St Patrick’s School
Greymouth

Whitney Hansen (*E-Learning Team Leader*)
St Francis of Assisi Catholic School
Mairehau

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