

A Reconceptualist Approach to the Religion Curriculum at St Thomas More Primary School

In a Reconceptualist approach, the classroom Religion Program becomes a primary arena for dealing with the critical religious issues and concerns of life. There are three key considerations for teachers using this approach: the *Avoidance of Presumptive Language*, *Teaching 'about' the Tradition* and *Powerful Pedagogies*.

Avoidance of Presumptive Language

In the teaching of Religious Education at St Thomas More, all efforts are made to avoid the use of **presumptive language**. In a Reconceptualist approach, teachers do not start with assumptions about students' faith development based upon their particular religious affiliation. The language that is used is invitational and educational to engage students in the Religion classroom, allowing students who can readily identify themselves as Catholics to be affirmed by this approach. By using non-presumptive language, teachers provide students with the freedom to respond in ways that do not assume a programmed response (Brennan and Ryan, 1996).

Teaching 'about' the Tradition

When we **teach about the tradition** " it is important to focus on exploring the meaning of one's own religious life in relation to both those who share that life and those who do not" (Scott, 1984, p.334). In order to achieve this, teachers need to focus on developing a critical appreciation of one's own religious tradition along with an empathetic understanding of the religious beliefs and practices of others. In teaching about the Catholic Christian tradition, teachers need to provide a classroom environment that moves beyond simply being a place for transferring facts and knowledge.



At St Thomas More, teachers give witness to the values they place on their own personal religious beliefs, through the authenticity of the teaching processes they employ and also by who they are as people of faith. Within the Reconceptualist Approach, teachers are challenged to build critical distance between themselves and the content they are teaching, to make available space for authentic dialogue, and to allow students the freedom to investigate, to inquire and to use their religious imagination.

Powerful Pedagogies

At St Thomas More **powerful pedagogies** are used to engage students with the richest resources of the Christian tradition. In the teaching of Religious Education the BCE Model of Pedagogy (2012), five practices of Focus, Establish, Activate, Respond and Evaluate are consistently embedded to ensure there is a common language for planning and reflecting on learning and teaching in the Religion classroom. Teachers establish clear learning intentions and success criteria; activating multiple ways of knowing, interacting and opportunities to construct knowledge, teachers respond with feedback to move learning forward; and evaluate learning with students as activators of their own learning and act as resources for others.

Entitlement to Learning - Powerful Pedagogies

The Religious Education Program at St Thomas More identifies and articulates how entitlement to learning within the Religious Education curriculum is reflective of a Reconceptualist Approach and is enabled through flexible structures, effective timetabling and time allocation.

At St Thomas More Primary School, the Religious Education Program operates from an educational framework rather than a catechetical or shared Christian Praxis framework. The teachers of religious education avoid the use of presumptive language and making assumptions about student's faith development, based on upon their particular religious affiliation.

Our Religious Education Program allows students to explore their own religious tradition, whilst exploring and building empathy and understanding of the religious beliefs and practices of others. Students are given opportunities to inquire about and investigate their own faith and develop a deeper understanding of the faith of others.

At St Thomas More our Religious Education Program uses the BCE Model of Pedagogy for the teaching of Religion. Our common language for planning and reflection on teaching and learning within the religious education classroom are based on these pedagogical practices;

Focus – developing and nurturing a focus on learners and their learning

Establish – clear learning intentions and success criteria

Activate – multiple ways of knowing, interacting and providing opportunities to construct knowledge

Respond – with feedback to enable learning to move forward

Evaluate – learning to enable students to be activators of their own learning, and resources for others.

Powerful Whole School Pedagogies

The Religious Education Program at St Thomas More School is consistent with our whole school approaches to teaching and learning across the curriculum as articulated as part of our school vision of learning. Our Religious Education Program identifies and articulates powerful whole school pedagogies and is embedded in the BCE Model of Pedagogy to ensure continuity of learning for all students within and beyond the Religion classroom. Such connections enable the learning and teaching process in religious Education to be developed, communicated, supported and reviewed as part of established curriculum processes. The Religious Education Program is closely aligned with the three high yield strategies contained within the Delivering Excellent Learning and Teaching Strategy, enabling this to be included within learning walks and talks and the review and response cycle. A concentrated focus on the Three Worlds of the Text has enabled the teaching of Scripture to be a focus in the learning and teaching of Religious Education Curriculum.

