

Adventist Encounter Curriculum: The story continues

Lanelle Cobbin

Curriculum Specialist, Education Department, NZPUC, Canberra, NSW

Nina Atcheson

Curriculum Officer – Secondary, Adventist Schools Australia, Ringwood, VIC

Stories have always been a powerful medium. They have captivated humanity since ancient times and continue to draw us in via different mediums. Great stories engage us, shape our worldview and identity, and encourage us to live grander lives. Teachers of the Bible share a God-given privilege; they are Storytellers, creative crafters of words that teach by attraction; inviters of narrative experiences that capture the imagination and reach the heart. However, Bible teachers are far more than a storyteller using an effective pedagogical tool within an academic discipline, for they share ‘the greatest story’ the world has ever known. It is a metanarrative that surrounds us and bookends time itself.

“Each one of us has the potential to become both a chapter of history and His story”

Life’s lens adopts such clarity when we see our world through God’s story. We both find our place in it and live our life from within its truth. This is the story we were born for. *“God’s story isn’t over; it’s still being told today. Each one of us has the potential to become both a chapter of history and His story.”* Life brings new meaning when we connect with Him who is both Storyteller and Protagonist.

In 2008, Adventist Schools Australia and New Zealand Pacific Union Conference began a joint venture to develop a new Biblical Studies Curriculum for Adventist schools. The desire for the production team was for this new curriculum to introduce students to God in an environment that was Bible-based, engaging, academically rigorous, faith-building, and life-changing for both students and teachers from an Adventist worldview. At the close of 2014, the *Adventist Encounter Curriculum* will have completed its production and rollout, offering a range of teaching units and resources from Kindergarten through to Year 10. In the minds of the production team, this program has sought to share God’s Great Story, and in doing so, host meaningful encounters between God and His children.

Adventist teachers around Australia, New Zealand, England, and more recently, the United States*, are teaching from the *Adventist Encounter Curriculum* and have shown that they are passionate about living and sharing God’s Great Story. Below, they reflect on the impact it is making on their students.

Stories of connection

Secondary teacher Debbie McKay, from Toowoomba, Australia, writes how she invited her class to complete a task in Bible class. One of her students shares how she has seen her peers show a deep sense of connection with each other,

Encounter is an environment where my class feels really connected and comfortable with each other. The last assignment we had, two boys were presenting their work to the class. When they came to the ‘personal application’ part of the assignment, one of the boys started to open up to the whole class about a tragic event that had happened in his life in the past that most of us never knew about before. He then shared about how he overcame his struggles with God’s help and how the Bible story he and his assignment partner had studied had helped him. The whole class was really supportive of him and it was just awesome! (Female Secondary Student, Toowoomba)

At Noosa Christian College, QLD, Amy Turner allows time at the end of every topic for her secondary students to write her a letter where they can express their thoughts about God and ask any questions they may have. Amy is a busy teacher, and while this is time-consuming, she believes in honouring her students with a personal response. She writes back to every student, encouraging them in their spiritual journey, answering any questions they have. She also invites them to join a Bible reading plan or Bible studies. Many students respond

*An Adventist Encounter Curriculum pilot program is currently underway in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

to this offer each year. *"In a school where we have very few Christians, let alone Seventh-day Adventists, seeing them take this step in seeking a deeper relationship with God is really exciting,"* she shares.

Meg Harebottle, from Coral Coast Christian School in Bundaberg explores what the quality of *Thankfulness* really means with her Year 2 – 4 students. In the centre of the room, as a focus point, is a Promise-Well. They have read the story about how to fill someone's bucket and have explored how doing this helps people become whole in Jesus. Small buckets hang from the well where they can post promises from God. God's promises help 'fill us up' and become whole. Students use this concept as they share small testimonies at the local Salvation Army facility, where connections are made with the community and hearts are touched.

Stories of wonder

Noeline Timothy, teacher in Waitakere, New Zealand, sets out on a new narrative with her students. The topic is the Year 5 Easter message, with a focus on the symbolism of Jesus as the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. To highlight the symbolism of the lamb, Noeline purchases for each child a small ceramic and woollen lamb. Following the cultural practice of Jesus' day, on 'lamb selection day' they 'choose' their lamb, and for the next 10 days they proceed to 'care' for it. She is surprised at the attachment that develops. The children know that later they will need to bring their lamb and surrender it, for it is to be 'sacrificed.' They are genuinely disturbed about giving up their lamb (however simulated the experience). On the last day of school before Easter break, they are all present. Their lament is

genuine, their discomfort real. There is pleading not to sacrifice the lambs.

Noeline invites them to imagine that Jesus is really with them, and invites them to imagine the scene of the upper room by showing them a scene from a DVD entitled 'Matthew'. The students are sober and completely drawn in. This is not just another story that they hear people talk about. She can tell that this has become personal. They sense His invitation as He washes the disciples' feet, and then do the same for each other. They hear Jesus talk directly to them and offer them the bread. All is quiet and reverent, and their minds are curious. *What about the lamb? What about their lamb? Do they really have to give him up?* After viewing the scene of the cross and realizing that because of Jesus' sacrifice, the sacrifice of the lamb is no longer necessary, their relief is profound, and their wonder and awe for God is clear. They truly get it. *"Thank you, Mrs. Timothy! Thank you so much!"* *"Don't thank me,"* is her reply, *"Thank Jesus who made the sacrifice for us all."*

"Encounter has really helped deepen my own personal understanding of the Bible. At times we all learn together," Noeline continues. *"It's really helped me to grow in my relationship with God as well. I think my students see it. At times I share my own walk with God and I well up with emotion. They sense that and connect with it, and we all grow closer as a class,"* she says. *"I can't believe ideas for such moments are all there in print, just ready to take and use."*

Another primary teacher, Jovy Crallan, from Auckland, tells of doing earthquake drills with her Kindergarten students. She makes a call, and the children respond quickly by moving under desks and firmly holding on to them. She watches with wonder as they reassure each other, *"Don't be scared. Jesus*

Their lament is genuine, their discomfort real. There is pleading not to sacrifice the lambs



Noeline Timothy, primary teacher in Waitakere



Jovy Crallan, Kindergarten teacher, Auckland

is with us,” and proceed to spontaneously sing songs from their *Encounter* lessons. On another occasion in a Police lockdown practice, where they again need to move quickly under desks when ‘Lockdown’ is called, a boy spontaneously begins to pray. She is so assured that her children know when to pray. They know why and how to pray. It’s a strange place for wonder to reside, but she thanks God for making His presence known, even here.

Jovy is moved again as 5-year-old Elizabeth, overwhelmed with how perfect and beautiful everything was that God made at Creation, and that it will be this way again in Heaven, calls out in amazement, “Really? Really? Really?” She then boldly declares, “We have to pray.” She bows her head. The whole circle of students goes quiet and she spontaneously proceeds, “Please, please, please dear Jesus, make everything new again.” It is another moment of wonder for all, born from the heart of a child.

Five year old Tamatini, is also touched by God at the end of a unit on Creation. Students are invited to pray. Although not as familiar with prayer, his words emerge, clear and strong,

Dear God you are Holy Spirit and we love You, and You do love us because You made the world and the seas and the world and the moon and spaces, river, water... You made the people, You made the sun, You made the worlds and You made us, so we love You. Amen” (Tamatini, age 5, Auckland, NZ)

His words are captured on video and Tamatini’s parents are emotional and very surprised to see his conviction after attending the school for such a short time.

Stories of transformation

Teacher Meg Harebottle, also recalls with clarity the impact of the ‘Survivor’ Salvation unit on her senior Primary class. Towards the end of the unit, students are invited to personalize Isaiah 25:9, and then write a response to God about His incredible rescue plan for them. Out of this reflective time, 15 of the 16 in her class request Bible studies and baptism. A few days later, the one remaining boy comes to Meg and tells her that he also wants to commit to Jesus. She questions him and assures him that he need not feel any pressure at all to do this. In fact, she tells him that she admired him the day before for being true to his heart. But in their talking, she realises he is sincere, and that it is a quiet, deep, heart-searched decision. This class decision for God transforms the whole tone of her classroom.

Amy Turner further reflects on her Year 11 class. One of the girls has passively participated

in Encounter since Year 8. At the beginning of the year this student had a heartbreaking incident in her family where her brother committed suicide, which understandably rocks her world. Amy spends significant time debriefing and nurturing her, responding to her many questions about God and grief. Amy also prays for her. During the school’s Week of Worship, this young woman gives her heart to God. She shares her deepest thoughts with Amy, “I listened all throughout your Bible classes, and I wanted to believe, but felt like I couldn’t. I knew it all in my head from class, but now I know it in my heart.” Amy further shares, “While from my perspective I felt like the classes were not really reaching her, God was using them all along. The Encounter classes were the seed that would later develop into her desiring a relationship with God.”

Back in Noeline’s classroom, Yr 6 student Rachel reflects in her Encounter Journal after exploring the ‘Set Apart’ unit. She writes,

I am soon going to make a choice of following Jesus when it is the right time. I will make the choice of following Jesus and letting everyone know that Jesus is my Saviour and that I am going to do what He wants me to do.

Later she writes,

Dear Jesus, I want to live my life the way you lived. I want to show everyone that I have been set apart for you. Please help me to not be tempted into doing wrong and to stay with the Holy Spirit. Please help me to change in the a way that will please you. (Rachel, Year 6, Waitakere, NZ)

Rachel goes on to further Bible studies with a training pastor. Noeline’s excitement builds as three other girls, Maka, Claire and Lata request for Bible studies and 2 boys, Malu and Ananaia express their desire to be ministers for God when they

“I will make the choice of following Jesus and letting everyone know that Jesus is my Saviour”



finish school. God, the Great Author, is working on hearts.

Teacher Teresa Pollock, from New Plymouth, teaches another Salvation unit with a celebration theme. A number of God's gifts to us have been explored and the students are now reflecting on what this means to them. Teresa shares how salvation is God's greatest gift to us; that all we have to do is accept Jesus. A Year 4 boy, having been intent on the process and the current discussion bursts out with anxious enthusiasm, *"But I haven't done that before! How do I do that? I want to do it now. Please help me do it NOW!"*

Teresa, her heart warmed by his fervor, draws him aside and together they pray the prayer of repentance. He bursts with excitement, and all of Heaven celebrates.

Primary teacher, Ana Pepa, of South Auckland Adventist School, is frustrated because she is needed immediately in two places at once. Senior School Assembly is about to start, but the senior boys have just had a scuffle on the field emerging from a touch rugby game. She knows that bruised egos and raging hormones are not a good mix, and quickly places the boys with two school leaders in her classroom. She tells them this is their issue, and as young Christian men, they need to sort this out sensibly - and then she leaves the room, knowing it is risky to do so. After a while she returns with her class to find the door locked. They wait outside until one of the boys opens the door with the comment "Sorry, Miss, we were inside praying for each other." She is absolutely touched when they walk in to see the boys on their knees, with tears and hugs! "Best moment ever!" she shares. Suddenly she is humbled at the way God is moving on hearts and minds within her *Encounter* class discussions and learning experiences.

In regional Australia, a parent affirms a teacher and the powerful work the school is doing for the children through their *Encounter* and chaplaincy programs. He says with intensity, *"I need to tell you what you're doing here... It's much more than you realize."* Then he shares of another school family who had recently decided to separate. On telling their child, her response was *"No, but that's not what Jesus wants families to be. He wants us to be together and happy!"* These words make the parents sit back—and reflect—and persevere to work through their challenges. A different path was taken. Again, he says, *"What you are doing here is so good. It's impacting so many lives."*

Secondary Teacher and Chaplain, Blaire Lemke, from Tweed Valley Adventist College, reflecting on the impact of *Encounter* shares,

Through teaching Encounter to Year 10 this year, I have seen it help students and parents alike to hear God's voice and follow Him. I look forward to seeing more lives impacted and transformed for God's glory as a result of the Adventist Encounter Curriculum. (Blaire Lemke)

Stories of engagement

Teacher Andon Boyce from Canada, reflects on the engagement of his Year 9 students, *"I marvel at the fact that students are asking to keep copies of the book Messiah, so they can read it for themselves... I've never experienced this before! The students are given a taste for God and are hungering for more!"*

Two Year 9 students from the USA recently shared their thoughts on *Encounter*:

It's relaxed but not easy. I come to school looking forward to Bible class because it's fun and not stressful, but it's also deep. I've explored my beliefs a lot more this year. It's really made me think and grow. It's much less stressful without tests and homework and I learn so much better. This curriculum is God smart not just book smart. (Student 1, Year 9, US)

I like how teen-oriented it is. We aren't just hearing the same stories the same way. The curriculum shows a new light on the stories so we can have a different and less-biased view. It's less focused on education and more focus on personal understanding. (Student 2, Year 9, US)

Stories of new horizons

Back in Waitakere, New Zealand, Noeline Timothy's story is continuing and expanding in its scope. Her passion for God and her appreciation of the detail that the *Encounter* units offer has inspired her to take the content and broaden it, integrating it into her Literacy, Arts and ICT programs. As a part-time teacher teaching three days a week, she now takes the content and fashions it into an integrated two-hour morning block to include these other key learning areas. The results, in Noeline's estimation, are exciting.

Encounter has enabled me to really integrate God into so many subject areas. The Bible now underpins so much of what I do. I love to see God coming through in so many ways. I love that my students are coming to know Him, His character and His grace while learning new skills. It's completely changed the way I teach. (Noeline, Timothy, Waitakere, NZ)

Maria Simon at Gilson College, Mernda, is also integrating learning areas using *Encounter* topics as the core for the curriculum at this new school. As a foundation for learning, both biblically and pedagogically, *Encounter* lends itself to be expanded upon as new horizons are discovered.

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Teaching & Professional Practice

The Greatest Story... about you (and me)

It is exciting and encouraging to see students being encouraged to have an authentic encounter with God, the author of the Great Story, and that they can come to say with David, “God rewrote the text of my life when I opened the book of my heart to his eyes” 2 Samuel 22:25 MSG. This story changes lives because God Himself has drawn them to Himself. “If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to me” John 12:32.

As Amy Turner, says so aptly, “I have to remind myself that it’s the Holy Spirit’s job to convict them, not mine. I can plant the seed and tend the growing environment, and that’s all I can do. God does the miracle.”

Secondary teacher, Peter Lindsay, at Avondale High School, expands on this thought in his comment,

After having taught the program for four or five years now, since we started trialling the initial units, I have come to the conclusion that I really should be praying quite specifically for the Holy Spirit to be present in the classroom as we present to the students on a daily basis. To my shame, I must admit I hadn’t been praying that for every day before.

I think there is danger for Bible teachers to perhaps

think that in their classes at some stage they will say something so profound that the students will be moved to want to accept Jesus as their Saviour.

I came to the conclusion that that is not the way it is. It is the Holy Spirit who moves on students’ hearts, not what I say. As such I figured that I need to be praying for the Holy Spirit to specifically flood the classroom each day and that all evil angels will be forced to flee so that only God’s angels can be present to also encourage students. (Peter Lindsay, Avondale, NSW)

Our Story-teller teachers realise the significance of their roles in being instrumental in drawing children into the Greatest Story of all time. ‘He who co-operates with the divine purpose in imparting to the youth a knowledge of God, and molding the character into harmony with His, does a high and noble work.’ⁱⁱ

God alone is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Yes, it is *His Story*, but what a privilege to help write a chapter. **TEACH**

References

ⁱ‘Story’ (2006) by Steven James, Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, Michigan p. 84

ⁱⁱEducation (2009) by Ellen G. White, Everlasting Gospel Publishing Association, Soul, p. 18

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