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Transforming Classroom Practice

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TRANSFORMING CLASSROOM PRACTICE

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Is it possible to encourage Years 3-6 children to express their faith using a cross curriculum learning initiative?

Andrea Thompson, teacher at Avondale School's Toronto Campus, wanted to use an authentic cross-curriculum project to contribute to the holistic development of her students. She also wanted to find a way to help her students gain confidence in sharing their Bible knowledge and faith with their peers and families. She developed the Toronto Campus News (TCN), a project that is part of the weekly timetable.

Students at the Toronto Campus of Avondale School are at the forefront of 21st Century learning using information and communication technology in a creative and innovative way to meet the outcomes of the curriculum. Every student in Years 3-6 is involved in producing the school news, entitled Toronto Campus News (TCN) that features on the Avondale School website, at the local Campus Church, and at school for special events like Open Day.

Each student has several responsibilities, which contribute to the production of the news. These roles include script-writer, reporter, news anchor, communications director, stage manager, camera operator, wardrobe assistant, teleprompter, sound technician, and post movie editor. Students must first apply for their choice of job in writing, and are interviewed for the position before being assigned a role.

Collaboration is a key element in the TCN news program. The students are an integral part of a team. They nominate news stories for the

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Figure 1. Mrs Andrea Thompson with (left to right) back row: Jessica Pearce, Grace Lord, Uriah Leo, Kanayah Saifaleupolu, Nicholas Holt, Caitlyn Menzies, Riley Thomson, Sophie Holt, with front row (seated): Tamar Short and Jonathan Robins-Lilikakis. Photography: Advanced Life

next edition of the news and give reasons why the story they suggest should be included. As a group, they select which stories to include, and in which order they will appear in the program. Once news stories are assigned, students draft and write their scripts. Then they type their script into the TCN running sheet online, in a Google drive document. This gives the whole class the ability to add their segment to the running sheet at the same time. Students use iPads, both for typing news scripts, and in front of the camera as part of the teleprompter. The students use a green screen to create a virtual newsroom. Student lighting specialists and sound engineers make the news production smooth and efficient. Students also participate in a behind the scenes blog which includes photographs and videos.

Each edition of TCN is evaluated by the students, who are then paid for their work in TCN dollars. After paying 20% in tax, a further 10% in tithe, and paying rent on their office space, students have the option of spending their TCN dollars at the TCN shop for items that help them with their employment, for example pens, high-lighters, pencils, and post-it notes. Alternatively, they can save TCN dollars to buy their office space, or save for bigger items at the end of the year. This encourages financial literacy and good stewardship.

TCN has strong links to the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities, being Literacy, Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding, and Intercultural Understanding. But Andrea Thompson wants TCN to be even more than a top quality learning experience that connects learners with real life. She also wants it to connect children with their faith. This sometimes occurs through interviews, and a recent addition to the TCN news has been a devotional segment. This segment encourages the students to speak openly about their faith as they explain a Bible verse to their viewers.

One of the advantages of a small school is that all students are actively involved. Everyone is a vital part of the team. Even Year 3 students are expected to step up to the line—and they

do. It is also rewarding to see the older students mentoring their younger classmates. And while all this creative activity and learning is taking place, TCN serves another valuable purpose – sharing the faith and values of the school with the campus church, school families and friends, and the wider community.

Note: Recent editions of TCN may be viewed on (http://www.torontocampusnews.com/).

Figure 2: News writers (left to right) Grace Lord, Cassie Bennett and Tamar Short. Photography: Andrea Thompson

Figure 3: TCN production personnel. Desk (left to right) Cassie Bennett, Tamar Short and Jonathon Robins-Lilikakis with Riley Thompson observing. Photography: Andrea Thompson

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