

Applying Essential Questions to the Teachings of Religious Studies

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Students today are indirectly faced with a myriad of life-threatening events in our global community. As Christian teachers facing our students, we cannot pretend that these events are not occurring. Furthermore, we need to empower our students to apply faith-based learning to the questions they may have. Given this, one cannot help but think of Luke 21:26, "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken."

Our grade 12 program of study in the Crossroads Series includes Beliefs and Daniel and the Revelation. How can these topics be presented to spark the imagination and maintain students' interest?

It is important to maximize students' learning while considering their different learning styles. According to Gardener's theory on multiple learning styles, students need to express themselves in group settings and find ways of coming up with their own ideas. I tried to apply this idea in my grade 12 class by grouping students by topics- (i.e., Lesson 5--"Big Bang or Big God", and Lesson 3--"What an Awesome God!"). The essential question they all considered was "What difference does my belief in creation make in my life?" After brainstorming, groups then came back together as a class to share. Some ideas that came out of their seminar were: creation makes us responsible to be good stewards of God's planet; life was given at creation by God as something new and special; both Sabbath and marriage were created by God; marriage serves as a reminder of the first union in Eden; creation makes our work enjoyable, allowing opportunity for us to interact with God's gift. One of the most important lessons emerging from this discussion was that an individual's response to Creation or the Big Bang theory affects world issues such as wars and disagreements. Personal issues such as relationships and marriage were also affected. One student wrote in his personal response journal, "I have always thought of creation as necessary for life on Earth, but not as a principle that should inhabit every part of my life."

Our grade 11 class studied the book of Romans. During this study, I incorporated current events into Paul's discourse on dealing with evil. The idea emerged that not only should evil be condemned, but that silence is an indirect form of approval and an empowerment of evil. One outcome of this study was an in-depth look at a pastor in Florida who threatened and then later burned the Qur'an. We also examined the Libyan uprising for democracy, where Muslims and Christians protested and protected each other. Here, the essential question was: "What should my response be to events occurring around me in the world?" As a member of a global community, do we stand up for the rights of others? Are we responsible to register disapproval of evil? After a vibrant discussion, most students became aware of the need for activism in our world.

Using essential questions to teach curriculum is one way to help students make sense of their world. We live in a global community, and students must understand their connections to their world and their responsibility as Christians. Always we should keep in mind the promise Christ made that He would be with us, even until the end of the world.