

A Message from Sr. Shirley Anne...

Where Will You Journey This Year?

I soon realized that no journey carries one far unless, as it extends into the world around us, it goes an equal distance into the world within.

~Lillian Smith



Summer, especially the days of August, are often planning and dreaming times for teachers and catechists as they contemplate the beginning of another school year. Sometimes the focus is so curriculum and content focused that one can lose sight of the underlying mental, interpersonal and spiritual growth that is integral to support the journey. Likewise, the focus can so often be on planning for the student that the teacher/catechist can forget that they, too, as they engage with yet another unique group of students and their learning, will be challenged to move forward in their journey within.

This moving forward on the journey within can and often does mean change. A common point in discussions revolves around what is not working in our schools and religion programs – often around lack of interest and engagement of students in the programs. Although the general consensus is that schools and programs need to improve, somehow at the same time, they do not want change. Yet change is essential if we are going to prepare students for a future that is vastly different from the past and undoubtedly will resemble very little of the present. Actively engaging our children in the journey within is a critical step before we can expect them to walk a successful pathway in the spiritual, social, economic and political world of their culture.

How can we gauge student engagement? E. Yazzie-Mintz in his research report titled *Charting the path from engagement to achievement* (2009) defines engagement on 3 levels: Engagement of the Mind (cognitive, intellectual and academic), Engagement in School Life or Learning Environment (social, behavioral and participatory), and Engagement of the Heart (emotional, psychological and spiritual). Catholic School and Religious Education teachers and administrators could benefit from funneling their planning and strategies as well as the structure of their programs through this filter. It could mean the difference between students showing up (maybe) and passively enduring a program done to them OR actively engaging in and taking ownership for their own learning and allowing their learning to make a difference in their lives. We have a multitude of names to identify the outcome – college and career ready, independent thinkers, moral, faith filled citizens, global thinkers, etc... Whatever the name, it will not happen unless we are willing to change our strategies and environment to allow students to highly invest themselves in their learning and unleash their enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, creativity and, most of all, to have self-efficacy.

Educators tend to teach as they were taught. It reflects a model born out of the Industrial Age and it worked very well *then*. It is not a model for our time. As you use these lazy days of August to engage in readying your plans and learning environments for another year, will you make the journey within to unleash your own enthusiasm, creativity and self-efficacy to open up a whole new world of teaching and learning environments so that your students will become actively engaged in their own journey of learning?

