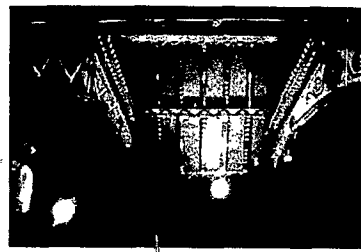


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Teachers help kids face war

Lisa Streb was teaching social studies to a classroom full of eighth-grade students at Brighton's Siena Catholic Academy on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001. After learning about the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., Streb prayed with her class. Then she turned on the radio, and she and her students listened to news reports of the attacks.

"There was a television available in my classroom, but I hesitated to show students what I feared might be very graphic scenes — better to let them see them later with their families. This proved to be a very wise decision on my part," Streb said.

In the aftermath of the Sept. 11 tragedy, educators have faced many similar decisions. Since that day, American troops have fought a war on terrorism in Afghanistan and another war in Iraq, and the violence in both countries doesn't seem likely to end soon.

Teachers are often charged with the difficult task of helping students make sense of confusing or frightening world situations, and there are as many different ways of doing this as there are teachers. The issues of war and terrorism are also handled differently depending on the age, grade level and maturity of each group of students.

War and terrorism are not taught as separate units in the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Rochester. Instead, they and other current events are discussed within the social-studies and religion curricula, according to Sister of St. Joseph Margaret Mancuso, diocesan assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

Depending on the grade level, "teachers would not focus on the politics of war, but



In January, Natalie Bevona (right), a third-grader at Chili's St. Pius Tenth School, and her classmates wrote Valentine's Day messages to servicemen and women stationed overseas. Some of the students have relatives who had been sent abroad.

rather the effects on the human person, communities, governments, the economy, the world community (and) the future," Sister Mancuso said.

Teachers in diocesan schools have accomplished this in a number of different ways. Jill DeCook teaches seventh- and eighth-grade social studies and English at St. Michael School in Newark, and both grades study several wars during their instruction in American history. DeCook also helps keep her students up to date on current world affairs through an exercise she calls Newswatch.

Through the Newswatch exercise, students bring in newspaper articles about national or world news and summarize them for the class. This activity not only helps students to know what is going on in the

world around them, but encourages them to spend the time necessary to develop better understandings of these events. DeCook said that many articles have focused on the war in Iraq and the United States' involvement in it, as well as articles about the criticism the country has received for that involvement.

"Many times short discussions follow articles, and I encourage students to express their views," DeCook said. "I'm often surprised by the depth of their knowledge and feelings. I try to let the students lead the discussion and express their feelings."

DeCook said she was also impressed by the depth of the questions her students asked when a soldier who had served in Iraq visited the class. Her students asked if American

soldiers in Iraq care about the Iraqi people; whether the United States' presence in Iraq has helped the Iraqis; and whether the soldiers who mistreated the Iraqi prisoners of war were justified, DeCook recalled.

Streb agreed that bringing veterans into the classroom to speak to students about their experience can be very effective. Soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War and the war in Iraq have visited the social-studies classes at Siena, she said.

"Listening to the teacher is not enough. Students need to question eyewitnesses and hear details from those who were there," Streb said. Such other primary sources as documentary video clips also can be very effective, since the

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