



St. Clare of Assisi School

Principal Kim Vangel's Blog
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Have you heard of this buzz-acronym in education: **STEM**? How about **STEAM**? Or now there's even **STREAM**! It's all over the news and school websites and it's a pretty big deal, so you might want to know why it's so important and to know if St. Clare of Assisi School has joined the STEM bandwagon.

STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. It's a term used to describe learning that incorporates two or more of those areas, and it strongly emphasizes real-world problem solving and critical thinking. STEM has been around in education for a long time; we used to call it cross-curricular learning and/or project-based learning. A few years ago, STEM grew to include the Arts as STEAM, and most recently the **R** was added for **Reading**; in Catholic schools we consider the **R** to stand for **Religion**. So why is it important for kids to be engaged in STREAM lessons and learning?

One thing we know about educating kids in this 21st Century is that our challenges in education are far different than they were for educators 50 years ago. In those "days of old," students and their families were living in a more consistent, predictable world. So their education was fairly straight-forward. Students learned information about the world around them; adults worked in jobs for long periods of time, often staying with the same company for their entire careers. Everyone had their place and their roles to play. Today's world is just about the polar opposite. Now our students have infinite amounts of information at their fingertips, able to have nearly any question "answered" with a simple Google search on their smartphone. The challenge today is not to have command of a great deal of information; now the challenge is knowing how to find information, and even more importantly, knowing how to use the right information in creative and productive ways. Today our teachers are always looking for ways to train our students to think critically, to be creative, to work in collaboration with others, to take risks, and to innovate. This is where STREAM comes in. When you combine Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics in one learning project (or some combination of those), you are going to have kids thinking critically & creatively, collaborating, taking risks, and innovating.



Are we doing this at St. Clare? You bet we are! Just in the last week I've observed STREAM lessons happening in 6 different classrooms because I've merely happened upon them. The one I'll share was in a 6th Grade Religion class with Mrs. Taormina. The topic was relationships. Mrs. Taormina read students a short story about two brothers who lived next door to one another and could not get along, and ends up being about building bridges to repair relationships. After reading the story, students broke into groups and worked on physically building a bridge together. They were given a finite set of supplies (popsicle sticks and masking tape) with the idea that they were to build the strongest bridge possible. I came upon the lesson when the groups were getting ready to test their bridges by putting weights on them, one at a time. Some of the bridges were stronger than others, most eventually collapsed under the weight of 5-6 packages of index cards. Students followed up the next class with

reflections about what they learned together during the activity, and how those lessons can apply to their relationships with Jesus Christ and with one another. And that, my friends, is how we do **STREAM** at St. Clare of Assisi School!