

Q&A with Carolyn Steinman

MASADA COLLEGE

TRACY ESSERS

From a passion for education to photography and her recent move back to Sydney, here's a bit about Masada's new Junior School Head of Jewish Studies/Hebrew.

Q: Where were you living before your move back to Sydney?

A: My family and I recently relocated from Melbourne, where I taught Studies of Religion, Psychology and girls' Gemarah.

Q: What drew you to Masada?

A: From the first interview I had, I immediately noticed the warmth of the school and the cohesive nature of the staff, who see themselves as one body from Year K all the way through to Year 12. One of the first things I was taken by at the school is the professional learning seminars, which the staff are encouraged to attend. I was also drawn to Masada's Culture of Thinking, an approach which helps students move away from spoon-feeding towards a culture of thinking for themselves. I definitely think it was the right decision for me to come to Masada.

Q: What challenges do you think lie ahead for you in your new role?

A: I am trained as a secondary-school teacher but I'm now teaching primary and high school.

Primary-school teaching is going to be a learning curve for me as the classes need to



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be structured differently; younger students need more direction. I think it will be an exciting challenge for me to teach across the school.

Q: How does your teaching style differ between high school and primary school?

A: By high school, pupils have started thinking more about the world. A real relationship with students can be formed by

then. But younger pupils say in Year 5, ask questions that are the hardest to answer. My responsibility is to give them an answer that encourages further learning but satisfies their curiosity.

Regardless of age or grade, as a teacher I try not to do most of the talking in my classes; I prefer to facilitate learning. For example, on Purim I told my students

that they had to ask a question about the Megillah that they did not know the answer to. The pupils came back with questions that our Sages had asked, which was both surprising and exciting. I tried to simplify the answers that our Sages gave without losing the main points of the argument.

Q: What do you see as your role in the Jewish Studies department?

A: I see my role as teaching students to connect to Judaism in a sophisticated way. Their connection needs to grow with them as they mature over time, and the Jewish studies curriculum must keep pace with their secular studies. In this way, I aim to help pupils see the relevance and value of Judaism and their current world.

Q: What makes you "tick"?

A: I have a particular passion for girls' education especially in a co-ed school and strive to make sure that the girls are given an equal opportunity in the classroom. At the same times, I know how important it is for me to be a role model and for the students I teach to have a positive experience with both religion and religious people. I'm really lucky to work in a job that is my passion and captures the essence of who I am.

Q: Besides for teaching, what else keeps you busy?

A: Apart from being a wife and mum to three children aged 21, 20 and 18, I also dabble in photography and graphic art in my spare time.