

# JOYCE BRUNER: An Empowering Vision

Nov 24 2014

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Twelve years into her career as a middle school teacher, Joyce Bruner arrived at Jessamine Central — the county’s alternative school — for a job interview and she discovered that half of the school was housed in a double-wide trailer. The other half sat in the bottom of an ancient building, and the principal’s office was her van.

It may have surprised Bruner’s colleagues when she left her job as an English teacher to work at Central, but it felt like home to Bruner.

“I had been haunted by the faces of kids I didn’t have the chance to reach,” she said. “These kids stayed in my nightmares because they needed things I couldn’t provide. I knew at Jessamine Central that I could make a difference with these kids. These were the ones I always wanted to help.”

And that she has for the past 14 years. The school, now called The Providence School, serves students who aren’t having good success in their neighborhood schools. These students often thrive at Providence, but Bruner noticed that an alarming number of graduates were struggling with “doing life” after graduation.

Why? The students lacked the networking and social skills that so many of us take for granted. Moreover, they lacked a “life vision.”

“Kids were not getting experience as problem solvers. They didn’t have a picture of where they wanted to go,” Bruner said.

So, Bruner and her middle school colleagues created Vision Driven Learning, an ambitious program that addresses students’ needs by putting them in charge of their education — giving them the opportunity and responsibility to envision their future. The program incorporates research based learning where the students explore topics on their own.

Bruner also enlisted help from the community, and wrote grants to help fund the program, which started three years ago. In addition to VDL, Bruner adopted Project Based Learning to give students the hands on tools to implement their vision.

“Students love that they can drive their own learning,” Bruner said. Said Principal Charlanne Pook: “Vision Driven Learning is her brainchild and she has done unbelievable things in the classroom.”

And those haunting faces at night?

“They’re gone. Our students are empowered. I have never had this level of engagement before.”

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