

Engaging with the Staffordshire Agreed syllabus for Religious Education.

The Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus affirms that the role of RE is to foster in each pupil a growing level of religious literacy, through three complementary aims, encapsulated as Exploring, Engaging, Reflecting. The first two of these correspond to the standard themes of “Learning about” and “Learning from” religion. The third aim calls for pupils to “acquire a growing range of the social, spiritual and emotional skills and dispositions appropriate to living well in a religiously plural and open society, by reflecting on the reality of religious diversity and on the issues raised by living in a diverse world”.

EXPLORING

1) An increasing core of insightful knowledge concerning religions and beliefs, both in Britain and in more global terms;

By exploring religious beliefs, teachings and practices – so acquiring knowledge and understanding of religious stories, sacred texts, lifestyles, rituals and symbolism that offer insight into religious experience and living within a faith community.

ENGAGING

2) A developing capacity to engage with ultimate questions and to formulate their own sense of identity and values;

By engaging with fundamental questions – so appreciating the human and religious questions that are raised by life and its experiences, and through which meaning, significance and value are forged, and by expressing and evaluating their personal responses to such questions- so gaining skills to be able to relate the things studied and discussed, to their own experience.

REFLECTING

3) A growing range of the social, spiritual and emotional skills and dispositions appropriate to living well in a religiously plural and open society;

By reflecting – on the reality of religious diversity and on the issues raised by living in a diverse world - so developing skills of analysis and discernment in relation to prejudice, discrimination and bias, together with skills of self-awareness, moral judgement and responsible choice.

While this aspiration relates realistically to the demographic situation in the country as a whole, the population in Staffordshire is markedly less diverse than that of neighbouring authorities, of the region, and of England, both in religious variety and in numerical presence. This presents certain challenges for teachers as they work to bring the third aim “to life” in the classroom, and so enable their pupils to have the opportunity and experience of engaging in and reflecting on religious diversity.

The Westhill/NASACRE Award

Staffordshire SACRE successfully bid for a Westhill/NASACRE award in order to offer Staffordshire pupils an interfaith encounter that supports and promotes the syllabus aims. The intention was to provide a compelling learning experience with a firm foundation for schools to build upon. As a result, the interfaith experience 'Explore Engage Reflect' was launched at a central venue in Staffordshire.

'Explore, Engage, Reflect' consisted of a Christian and Muslim experience aimed at pupils in Years 5 through to Year 8, and led by adherents to the faiths who are skilled in the field of education. The experience took the form of a morning encounter with Christianity and an afternoon encounter with Islam (or vice versa). It was designed to be fully interactive with pupils **exploring** artefacts, images and text; **engaging** with key questions relevant to the faiths in question; and **reflecting** on what it means to live your faith within England through a real opportunity for dialogue.

Explore Engage Reflect

Staffordshire's schools were invited to attend the 'Explore Engage Reflect' and bring a representative group of pupils accompanied by a teacher. We were joined by over 80 enthusiastic young delegates, eager to increase their understanding of faith and belief.

Pupils visited the experience in small groups and were provided with an ipad to use to document their experiences. Using an app called 'Book Creator' pupils were able to video, photograph, record voice notes and add text to enable them to capture their learning in a virtual environment. Collaborating with their peers supported the opportunity for thorough investigation and meaningful exploration and dialogue. At the end of the day, schools were asked to upload their e-books into a virtual classroom hosted by the Showbie platform (Showbie is available either as an app on ipads or on any android device). A resource pack of preparation and follow up materials was provided to prepare schools for using the technology and to support pupils to get the maximum benefit from the experience.

"I have enjoyed the activities – they have improved my knowledge massively"



Dialogue

Dialogue was a key feature of the exhibition and time was deliberately built in to ensure that pupils had a direct opportunity to discuss what it means to live out your faith with adherents of faith communities. Pupils had the opportunity to ask 'anything and everything' and they did! They also took the opportunity to discuss things that puzzled and surprised them in equal measure.

"It was nice asking questions and finding out more about Christianity"

The virtual Showbie classroom now acts as a legacy resource, supporting our schools and equipping them to meet the requirements of the third syllabus aim. It has documented the experience of the exhibition, allowing pupils to share their learning creatively with their peers, also acting as an inspiration for schools wishing to put together their own interfaith experience in school. The virtual classroom has been made available to all Staffordshire schools as a supportive aspect for the syllabus.

"It was extremely exciting and interesting – this is a day never to forget. Well done! Thank you!"

Future impact

The sustainability of 'Explore Engage Reflect' long term was important and the two organisations involved in the creation of the exhibition have managed to create a mobile resource that can be used in any school or venue wishing to use them.

Information related to our project can be found on the Westhill/NASACRE website:

<http://www.westhillendowment.org/staffordshire-sacre/Our-progress>

Our virtual classroom can be accessed by creating your own Showbie account (join as a student and **not** as a teacher) and using the class code: YK6L5

For further details on booking or recreating your own 'Explore Engage Reflect' exhibition email emma.jardine@entrust-ed.co.uk

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