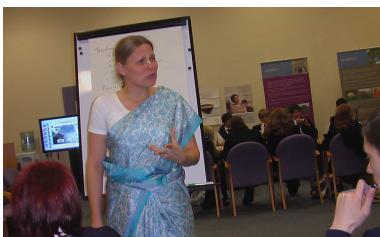


Different Faith, Shared Values

What is Inter Faith Week?

national inter-faith week
21–27 november 2010

Inter Faith Week ran across England and Wales for a second year from Sunday 21 to Saturday 27 November. Just over two years ago in July 2008, the Department for Communities and Local Government published 'Face to Face and Side by Side – a Framework for Partnership in our Multi Faith Society', that outlined the then Government's strategy for encouraging the further development of inter faith activity in England. The report promoted the value and importance of inter faith dialogue and suggested a framework of how faith communities, Government and wider society could work together, at all levels, to bring people with different religions and beliefs together.



Following this report, the Executive Committee of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

proposed that there be an Inter Faith Week drawing on experience of a successful Week of this kind held in Scotland. The aims of Inter Faith Week are to: strengthen good inter faith relations at all levels; increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, and, in particular, celebrate and build on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society; and increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious belief. We designed the conferences around these aims.



Why the development of Inter Faith Week school Conferences?

The key aims of religious education in schools are to help students develop knowledge and understanding of religions represented in Great Britain, use this to explore questions of meaning and truth and reflect on their own beliefs and values. Good RE promotes open-mindedness, respect and

empathy for others. Engaging with a variety of people from diverse beliefs and faiths can help students learn about faiths and develop these attitudes. Through this approach RE makes a significant contribution to the development of community cohesion both locally, nationally and globally.



SACRE wanted to support this particular work in RE by giving students in Durham the opportunity to encounter people of different faiths and values from across the North East, their local community. They felt Interfaith conferences in Durham would provide an enriching and memorable learning experience for young people.



SACRE are also aware of how daunting it is for teachers to organise such events themselves. SACRE wanted to

support colleagues by modelling a conference, giving teachers the opportunity to make contact with people of faith and providing them with practical advice on how to organise a conference in the future in their schools.

The Conference



Following on from the success of the Secondary Inter Faith Week Conference in 2009 and the SACRE bursaries given to schools, we decided to organise two conferences in November 2010 so that children and young people from our primary and secondary school across Durham could benefit.



Both of the conferences were split into two sessions, a morning and an afternoon,

allowing for capacity and ensuring costs were kept within budget. The theme of the Primary Conference on the 16th of November was 'encountering expressions of faith - how do people worship?' 81 Years 3-6 KS2 children from 8 different primary schools met people of different faiths in two different workshops that hinged around how faith members worship.



There was a selection of interactive and creative workshops: Dorothy Sadlik from SACRE led a workshop on Jewish prayer and worship and focussed on Hanukah; Sharon Pritchard's and Andy Hawkins' (from Durham Diocese Board of Education) workshop explored the different and diverse ways Christians can worship; Curt Gardener shared his experience of worship for the Quaker tradition that hinged around 'being still'; Kirtida Richardson ran a workshop that focussed on Hindu shrines and music in Hindu worship; John Roxborough from the Durham

Oriental Museum explored the meaning and purpose of Islamic art.



After the carousel of workshops, all the children joined together in the panel session to ask the representatives questions that had been provoked during the workshops. The children asked a spectrum of insightful questions such as: *What do you do when you pray? Have you ever cried during worship or prayer? Why do you want to be in your religion? Is it difficult belonging to your religion? What is the most important part of your faith?*

The theme of the Secondary Conference on the 18th of November was 'A matter of life and death'.



94 Year 9 and Year 10 students met people of different faiths and values in workshops that focused on life and death issues. The workshops took the form of a philosophical discussion that explored personal beliefs about life after death and some incorporated ethical considerations around the sanctity of life and such issues as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment and medical ethics.



The young people experienced two different workshops from a selection that were led by Wendy Gray our Buddhist SACRE member; Kirtida Richardson representing Hinduism; Rabbi Lewis; Roger McAdam representing Humanism and Paul Southgate from the Roman Catholic tradition. After the two workshops, just as in the primary conference, all the young people met together once more and asked the panel questions.



There was an engaging debate around questions such as: *In certain situations throughout your life, have you ever questioned your religion in any way? In your opinion and also in your religion are women equal to men? Do any of you believe in the big bang? If religions believe in a greater being where did that "God" come from and what happened before its existence? Does what you do in this life determine what happens when you die? Do you truly believe that there is life after death or do you want to believe that there is something after death as the human mind can't cope knowing there is nothing?*



*Different Faith,
Shared Values*

In summary:

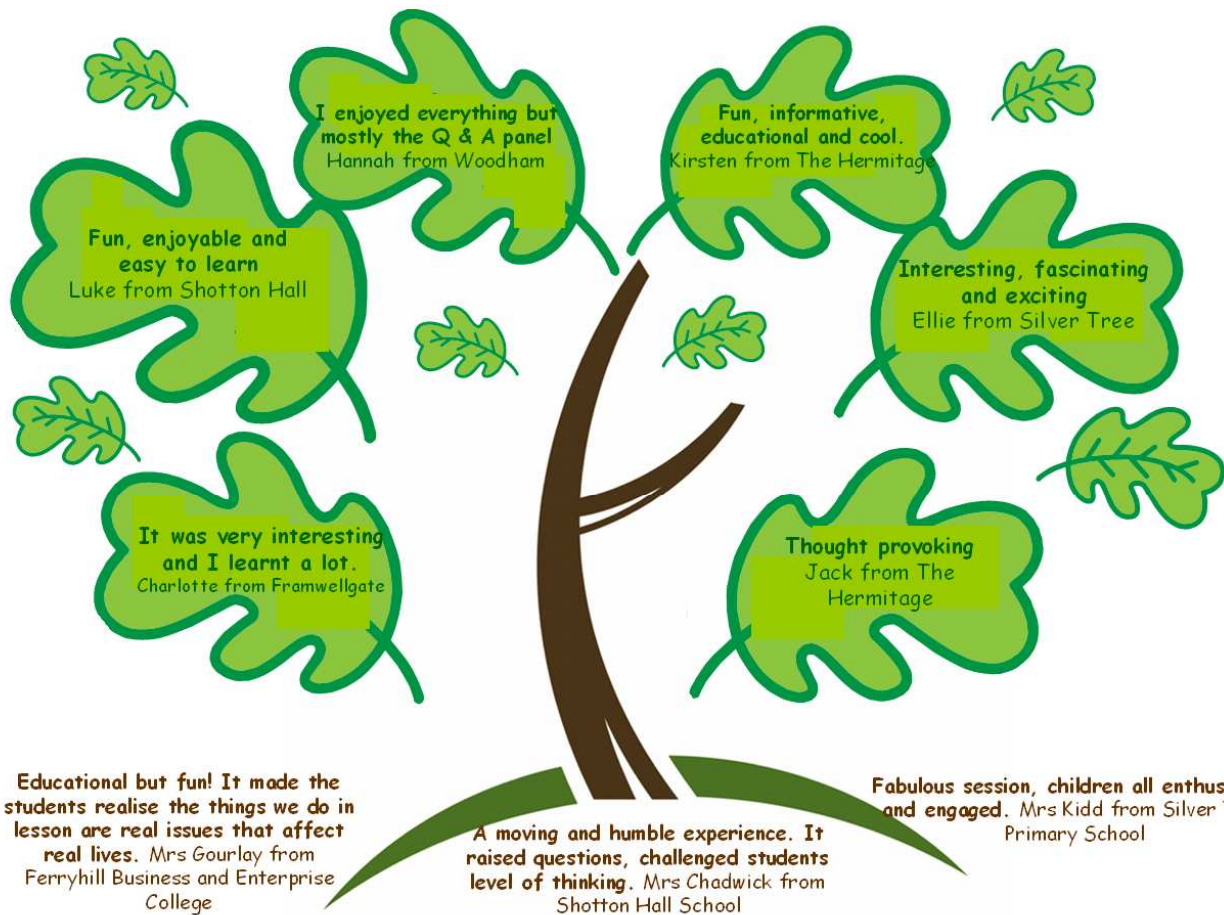
We were delighted by the responses from the children and young people and from the quality of the workshops delivered by the different representatives.



The support from SACRE and Durham Faith Network members who attended was invaluable. The conferences were engaging and thought provoking for all those involved, they increased awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the North East of England, they increased understanding between people of religious and non-religious belief and strengthened good inter faith relations.

This can be seen in the following comments:

SACRE Inter Faith Week Report



It is an exciting learning opportunity for our students, a chance to explore new areas in RE that they have not come across yet in some cases, but most of all very personal to meet the speakers and interact with them. Mr Welch from The Hermitage School.

