

**Project title: What does it mean to live in a religiously diverse society?**

**Introduction**

Schools in County Durham and South Tyneside were invited to participate in a project to embed enquiry based learning in the RE curriculum. The enquiry would focus on developing questions, researching and making presentations about the diversity of religions and beliefs within and outside the North East region. Several schools were selected to participate in the project in order to build greater capacity and links between departments across the region. The project also aimed to enable Durham and South Tyneside SACREs to work together on a common project and jointly implement an aspect of their newly revised Agreed Syllabuses (the cycle of enquiry – see appendix).

**Phase One – Autumn Term 2013 – Beginning the Enquiry**

An initial meeting was held at the Durham Learning Centre where teachers from nine Durham schools and three South Tyneside schools met to discuss the concept of enquiry based learning and how to set up the enquiry project.

In this meeting teachers looked at photographs and census data from the North East region in order to shape an enquiry question relating to what it means to live in a religiously diverse society.

From this, teachers set up the enquiry project in their schools. Schools organised this in different ways. For example, some colleagues worked with more able and talented students through an extra-curricular project; others worked with a mixed ability class group. In some schools students from a number of classes met and worked together.

Teachers supported students at the beginning of their enquiry by providing resources e.g. the census data, photographs, newspaper articles about faith in the community. Students analysed these resources and used them to identify the questions they would want to explore further throughout the enquiry.

**Phase Two – Autumn Term 2013 – Interfaith Conference**

In order to gather a range of responses to their enquiry questions, students from each school were given the opportunity to attend an interfaith conference. Students met faith members from Durham SACRE and representatives from a variety of religions and beliefs in the local area. Students had the opportunity to ask their questions to individual faith members in small group sessions and through a formal question panel. This enabled students to compare and contrast responses from different faith traditions.

### **Phase Three – Autumn Term 2013 – Evaluating Further**

Back at school students discussed and evaluated the outcomes of the interfaith conference and how this helped them address some of their enquiry questions about the diversity of religious beliefs. Some students fed back their findings to larger groups of students in school. Students in some schools created articles which were published in school newsletters or magazines. Some students produced presentations of their findings.

In addition, teachers met to discuss this phase of the enquiry cycle and evaluate the impact of the interfaith conference on the enquiry. It was widely acknowledged that the interfaith conference had been a huge success and it was suggested that it is repeated as a stand-alone event or as part of another enquiry. Feedback included comments such as *“it greatly enhanced learners understanding of the impact of faith on lifestyle”*. Some schools described the experience as a *“light bulb moment for some of our students meeting some of the different speakers. Massive learning curve. Great insight into the different faiths.”*

It is envisaged that schools may replicate the model of the interfaith conference on a local level and collaborate with each other to create a similar experience for students so that they can actively engage with faith members. The enhanced collaboration between schools and SACRE as a result of this enquiry project has increased the viability of follow up activities and projects.

### **Phase Four – Spring 2014 – Visiting Faith Communities**

This phase was slightly delayed due to staffing issues; some teachers lacked the impetus to plan and arrange visits without central support and micro-management. A reorganisation of project management was implemented and a meeting was organised in order to support colleagues with their planned visit outside the region, to exchange ideas and to enable colleagues within similar enquiries to work together and share resources.

In this meeting teachers also looked at some successful enquiry based project models, one good practice resource from Ofsted included a report of from St. Anne’s C of E Primary School in County Durham who have successfully used enquiry based learning in geography. Other documentation expanding on the enquiry cycle, as well as the Durham Agreed Syllabus were also discussed in order to endorse the importance of following the enquiry cycle.

The visits which were arranged by participating schools were as follows:

Woodham Academy	25 <sup>th</sup> March 2014 - Visited Bradford with high ability Year 8 cohort of 30. Co-funded by school (through a specialist day budget).  Visited the Mosque, including a guided tour and then additional time was provided for questions and discussion about the ‘Impact of faith’. Students prepared a set of questions in advance and visited Bombay Stores afterwards.
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Harton Technology College Jarrow School Hebburn Comprehensive School	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2014 – Visited Bradford and collaborated together in order to visit the Gurdwara and Mosque to understand what it means to live in a religiously diversity society, also to analyse the impact religious belief has on society and individuals.  They also had lunch at the community centre with a multi-cultural buffet and activities.
Wellfield Community School	17th June 2014. Visited Bradford with a high ability Year 8 cohort of 25 students and visited a Mosque in order to get different perspectives on questions they believed were important to the enquiry.
Seaham School of Technology Wolsingham School and Community College The Hermitage Academy	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2014 - Visited Bradford and collaborated to visit a Mandir and Gurdwara, with specifically prepared questions and tailored presentations requested surrounding the impact of religious belief in the local area, the impact of immigration and the growth of Bradford as a religiously diverse community.  They also had buffet lunch in a local Indian restaurant after a morning of exploring faith traditions originating in India.
Sunnydale Community College Greenfield Community College	26 <sup>th</sup> June 2014 – Visited Bradford, a Mosque and Gurdwara with a cohort of 45 students and explored the key questions raised by the enquiry.
King James I Academy	28 <sup>th</sup> June 2014 – Visited Leeds, A smaller cohort of 6 students stayed overnight and visited a Mandir as well as the Roman Catholic Cathedral. Question and answer session in the Mandir was held and the students observed worship.
Park View School	November 2014 – Visiting Leeds Grand Mosque.

### **Phase Five – Spring 2014 – Evaluate and Present**

This phase of the cycle allowed students to reflect on what they had learnt about religious diversity in another region and evaluate how visiting faith communities helped to address the enquiry questions.

Many schools created articles for school newsletters and magazines in order to present their findings about religious diversity in the region and in the country. Some schools gave students the opportunity to present their findings to their peers and school community e.g. through assemblies.

### **Phase Six – Summer 2014 – Present, Reflect and Evaluate**

Due to time constraints, (for example, the demands of external examinations and curriculum planning in school) this phase of the cycle has not been well implemented; the delay in phase four

had a knock-on effect and thus many schools lacked the time to fully evaluate the project at this stage. Many schools therefore amalgamated phase five and six.

It was also decided that it was not feasible to re-create a conference attended by SACRE members at this stage in the academic year. Instead, a summary and evaluation of the enquiry project, will be presented to Durham SACRE at its scheduled meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014. Students from two schools will make presentations on their findings. Presentations will also be made at South Tyneside SACRE on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

Despite the difficulty completing this phase of the project, a teacher meeting was held in Durham Learning Centre in summer 2014 to discuss the outcomes and impact of the project and develop ideas about ways forward for the future.

### **Phase Seven – Autumn 2014 – Promoting the project for the future.**

A final evaluative meeting was held at the Durham Learning Centre in October 2014. In this meeting teachers were given their original plans and then asked to evaluate the different stages of the project as well as to analyse the overall impact of enquiry based learning in their school.

Some schools have used this opportunity to embed the enquiry cycle into schemes of learning in order to engage a wider range of students in the future. One issue noted by some participants was that without the support of SACRE and funding available, schools would find it hard to develop such a project.

One significant outcome of the enquiry project is the creation of a regional hub to look at the pedagogical approach of enquiry based learning in RE and create opportunities for networking across the wider region. This will help to develop new links for practitioners. The hub will serve as an opportunity for teachers to engage in their own professional development through action based research.

In feedback about the enquiry project teachers stated that they would welcome the opportunity to take enquiry based learning to the next level within their classroom and school. The enquiry based project has therefore acted as an impetus for engaging in wider enquiry in the classroom; its success has ensured that the results of the project will be widely disseminated within the region and that capacity will grow as a result.

### **Conclusion**

The enquiry project has therefore succeeded in developing a deeper knowledge and understanding of religious diversity amongst the participating students, the results of which were disseminated within schools.

This enquiry project has been led by students and has given them the opportunity to develop their own questioning, direct their own research and evaluate their findings thus exploring the different impact that religion and belief has on individuals and communities within and outside the North East region. This has developed skills such as independent learning, collaboration, evaluation, presentation and organisation.

Students have benefited from the enquiry project through extending their knowledge and understanding about religion and belief, meeting faith members and exploring their views. The

enquiry cycle has helped strengthen the social skills of students as they have met a variety of people with differing backgrounds and experiences.

Teachers have benefited from the enquiry project as they have participated in CPD, collaborated, shared ideas and resources. An opportunity to create a regional hub will continue to support teachers as they look to embed enquiry based learning firmly within their scheme of learning.

Schools have benefited from the enquiry project as it has allowed them to develop links with SACRE, and demonstrate spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students, particularly in relation to social and cultural issues.

SACRE have benefited from the enquiry project as members have been able to actively contribute to learning and networking with the schools they serve. It has raised the profile of the work of SACRE within both local authorities.

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