

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

IDEAS for WORKING ACROSS SCHOOLS

Below are some ideas for ways of linking your school or classroom with another within or beyond your own area.

It might be that you only have time to do things that fit into your existing scheme of work and there are some ideas here that will add something easily to what you do already. You may have time to develop something extra and there are some ideas for bigger events. It might be that you can lead an RE themed topic for a week or half-term. Whatever the possibilities, it is hoped that many of the ideas below would be ones that you would want to consider, as working with other RE specialists or subject leaders can be rewarding and enriching especially if you feel a bit isolated for subject support within your own school.

Whether you can take on just one of the following ideas, or are able to stretch to several of them, we hope that there is something to inspire you to spotlight RE in your own and a neighbouring school, or schools – and your neighbour(s) could be a long way away!

As well as considering the ideas on this page you may also like to think about some of the suggestions on the website for primary and secondary schools, for special schools, for pupils gifted in RE and for RE in the community, as these articles suggest activities you could develop in collaboration with another school instead of simply planning them for your own classroom.

A community fair

Why not run a community fair with a focus on religions, beliefs and cultural life across your community, inviting in a range of people from your locale from different faiths and traditions? There would be lots of wonderful curriculum activities spinning off from the organisation of such an event and it could be a very positive focus for the community and for schools at its heart. This is a



real chance for pupils to explore how religion is lived in the local community and how different groups express their own faith through the vehicles of story, food, dance and also look to explore the variety and diversity within the faith communities.

Working with another school gives the RE subject leader a chance to pool resources and time and also involve local religious groups and the local adviser, if you have one.

The event could run at a weekend or on a half-day. It would be a good occasion on which to invite journalists from local media (see *Publicising your events and activities* article in 'What can you do?')

Develop a local trail

Working with a partner school, get the pupils to develop a spiritual / religious trail in your locality. For some examples of what these might look like see www.retrails.org.uk; the website also includes a 'toolkit' to help a school develop its own trail. If you work in partnership it is easier to create a larger trail dividing up the area and the places to visit between your schools / classes or to develop one that runs between the two schools. The trail could include street names that have links to the religious history of your area e.g. Priory Street, Abbey Lane. Constructing a trail as a partnership activity halves the work for each school but gives each one a second part of the trail to explore.

When you've developed your trail submit it to the trails database at the above site.



A joint project / piece of work

One of the joys of RE is that there is flexibility within most Agreed and Diocesan Syllabuses to improvise, explore and develop ideas. So there should be no problem in embarking on a joint piece of work between schools. This could be any topic from your syllabus or it could be a joint project to work on a GCSE topic. It might be that you are able to get pupils together physically in order to work on a piece of written, audio-visual or model work, or it perhaps you could work virtually using a piece of cyberspace to share materials “in the cloud”. A few ideas are:

- Develop a short piece of film about faith in a community
- Develop a story sack for use with younger children
- Design and build a model of a multi-faith place of worship
- Develop a set of rules for ‘a community of tolerance’
- Develop a menu, and then cook the food for a multi-faith gathering.

There will no doubt be endless possibilities related to your own syllabus. The advantages of working together include the chance to celebrate achievement, exchange ideas and develop mutual support where there is differing expertise. Such a project would also give teachers the opportunity to see how a unit of work from their syllabus is interpreted by another school and this itself could help to develop a fruitful working partnership both with the partner school and with the local SACRE.

A project of this kind might take a little more energy and commitment than is always available, but the benefits could be have real impact and be long lasting.

For some more ideas of what is possible see:

- a. RE and community cohesion project - www.community-cohesion.org.uk

A number of projects here illustrate ways of exploring links across schools, whether primary and secondary, community and special schools or community schools and those with a religious character.

- b. Schools Linking Network - <http://www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk/>

The aim of the SLN is to facilitate links between schools in England to help children and young people explore their identity, celebrate diversity and develop dialogue. This can be especially valuable for pupils where they are working with their peers from different religious, philosophical or cultural backgrounds as it energises them to consider life, issues and questions of meaning from different perspectives. Its website gives some excellent examples of schools working together and many of the themes and ways of working could be adapted for RE.

Inter-School debate

Like many of the other activities in this article, this could be a physical or an electronic opportunity.

Debate can be a great activity for developing the Higher Order Thinking Skills that are vital for stretching and challenging pupils, and provides opportunities for them to improve their effective use of argument, or provide justification and evidence. They are an excellent way to explore areas that are contentious or controversial. If you can develop a link with a school which has a very different ethos, then pupils become exposed to a different value set (for example, a community secondary school in eastern England set up an electronic exchange with a school in Florida and the two groups of students were astonished at the differences in each other’s views on abortion).

See the website article on *Gifted in RE* for more ideas on conducting debates.

Sixth form / GCSE conference

The flexibility of secondary curriculum frameworks now gives greater possibilities for undertaking a whole day activity and getting GCSE or AS / A2 pupils together across a number of schools. This makes either inviting in external speakers or developing your own programme more cost-effective and allows you to involve a wider range of expertise. Contact your local SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on RE) or IFN (Inter Faith Network) whose members may be able to help find you speakers for your conference.

Some topics that you might develop for a GCSE or sixth form conference are:

- Developing an ethical framework in a post-religious society
- Can you be a good person if you are not a god person?
- If God exists – prove it to me!
- Why should I care for the planet – what's it ever done for me?

Set up a virtual link

This could be local, national or even international. If getting out of the classroom is a problem or you do not have a neighbouring school which is physically accessible, then why not consider setting up a virtual link with another school? Again the Schools Linking Network (www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk) is a place to start to look at case studies of what others have done. You can then go about setting up an e-mail link with another school and plan what you will do together, identifying the potential benefits for pupils and teachers in both.

Another possibility is that of setting up an e-link with a school of a different character from your own in terms of contrasting intake or religious character. There are many ideas for this in work such as that of Julia Ippgrave – see her booklet 'Building e-bridges' for examples and suggested guidelines. It is available from www.retodayservices.org.uk.

As well as e-mail there is a range of other social networking tools which you might want to consider including Skype, NetMeeting and Instant Messaging Services.

When teaching RE it can be enriching to bring in an expert for a session, but this may be expensive and difficult to arrange. So why not find out if you can 'beam in' an expert? This could be an academic from a university to discuss a topic such as gene therapy if you are studying medical ethics, an expert on Kant for your AS level philosophy of religion class, or if you are working in a small village primary school, it could be an abbot, a rabbi or other community faith leader of whom the pupils can ask questions to find out about faith, belief or religious practices.

See the *Celebrating RE* website 'What can we do?' article on Social Networking for more ideas and suggestions.

Teacher Exchange

It can be very easy to get 'stuck' in a rut in your own classroom, especially if you have been teaching for a while in the same place, so you might explore the idea of exchanging with another teacher in your locality. This would provide you with new pupils on whom you could try out your best ideas and give your pupils the benefit of new approach from a different teacher. As well as being exposed to different pupils, it can just be invigorating for any established teacher to explore the way that teaching and learning take place in another environment.

If you are feeling more adventurous why not look to go farther afield? Perhaps to another city or even to another country? There may be language issues but it would be great to experience RE in a very different setting. Talk to your Local Authority or your adviser to see if they know about any funding opportunities or ask in school if you have an international schools liaison.

Another source of information might be a local teachers' group. If you are not sure where this is then see www.natre.org.uk for a list or www.eftre.net to find out a little more about RE around Europe.

'We all go together when we go' ... a joint visit

Visits are very powerful learning experiences. Most of us remember a school visit for much longer than we remember other things from school and the extended time allows us to develop some very powerful learning activities. The overheads of visits are large and combining with another school gives economies of scale. Why not think big? You could combine the joint visit with another of the activities in this or other sections, for instance to raise funds for a visit, or consider how this could work with sponsorship, or as a cross-curricular project. Look at the *Learning Outside the Classroom* article in 'What can you do?' for more ideas about visits.

Going beyond local places of worship, some destinations you might like to consider are:

- Walsingham [Norfolk]
- Canterbury [Kent]
- London or another major city, where you could combine visiting a place of worship of national significance and a museum or gallery with RE relevant displays
- The Holocaust Centre in Ollerton [Nottinghamshire]

or a longer visit farther afield e.g.:

- Auschwitz [Poland]
- Jerusalem and the Holy Land
- India



Pupil Link

As well as considering the possibility of going off to another school yourself, what about setting up a pupil link? As with the e-link, this might be especially interesting if you have a school of a very different religious or cultural mix to that of your own school in your vicinity. Such encounters provide an opportunity for using a wide range of different learning activities to help pupils engage with others productively. The visit doesn't necessarily have to be to another school; pupils from two schools could meet at a neutral venue which can allow both to be engaged on the same basis, rather than having the additional issue of taking on the role of hosts or guests. Such links could develop into an ongoing partnership between RE teachers with particular strengths. Again, the Schools Linking Network website provides examples, as does the RE and Community Cohesion site referenced above. There is also a range of opportunities and ideas on the website of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation (see www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/pages/education)

Working across schools is always going to take a bit more work than staying within your own establishment. But as suggested above, there are many potential benefits for pupils, teachers and the subject.