

Learning Outside the Classroom

Serving at the Gurdwara - a provider's perspective

Lancashire SACRE working with the Sikh community to enable schools to visit the gurdwara
Guru Nanak Cultural Recreation Centre and Sikh Gurdwara, Preston

What were we trying to achieve?

- to develop learning about and from Sikhism
- to experience the concept of *sewa*
- to understand authority
- to develop skills of enquiry and empathy
- to develop understanding through meeting believers

Cost: Nominal charge of £3 per head plus travel costs

Preparation:

Teachers were asked to discuss with their classes how they might prepare in the light of the Sikh unit they were studying. Lancashire's RE Consultant held meetings with the Sikh SACRE representative to discuss learning outcomes and prepare materials. Individual schools' needs were considered.

How do we organize the learning?

The period of preparation enabled learning to be personalised. In the *langar*, pupils discussed why shoes had been removed and heads were covered. In advance of the visit, teachers and pupils were encouraged to identify key questions. These were written on post-it notes and used to further inform the visit. Use of pictures of the community at worship linked prior learning to encountering the real experience and also encouraged AT1 and AT2 enquiry. Special consideration was given to the importance of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Pupils were asked to wash their hands before going into the prayer hall where music used during worship was being played. There they sat on the floor, initially in silence, and through guided imagery were able to imagine the sights, smells, tastes and sounds of Sunday morning worship. Artefacts were passed for smaller groups to identify or ask questions about. The use of instruments was considered and pupils invited to 'play' some. A talented Year 8 drummer was asked how this compared to the drumming he was used to. This led to consideration of how music might put believers in touch with the spiritual.

In the *langar*, teachers and members of the Sikh community served refreshments to pupils as they sat on the floor together. The concept of *sewa* (service) was considered and pupils volunteered to 'serve' by clearing away. Because behaviour had been respectful pupils were able to visit the holy book's bedroom and entered with a good level of 'appreciation and wonder' On leaving the pupils were given a small amount of sweets which acted as *prashad*.

What is the impact of the experience?

Both teachers and pupils commented on how much had been learned. A Year 8 teacher said, 'The boys gained a much deeper understanding of the Sikh religion. Visiting the *gurdwara* and having the opportunity to interview a Sikh brought the religion to life for them', whilst a boy from this visit remarked 'I think it would be challenging to be Sikh because they believe in equality and try to keep to their religion in everything they do. They have to take so much aggression and prejudice from others about their religion and still they try to do what is right.' One school commented, 'The visit was an authentic learning experience for the children and really brought learning to life.'

Follow up:

Schools confirmed that personalising the visit really aided learning. The Lancashire unit runs for six weeks. By building in a visit at the appropriate point, understanding and empathy has been enriched through the encounter with authentic experiences, beliefs and values and the lived tradition of these Preston Sikhs.

Contacts and links:

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