

Learning Outside the Classroom

When Strangers become Friends (1)

In the footsteps of pilgrims
Ripon Cathedral and Fountains Abbey

What are we trying to achieve?

Participants were given the opportunity to:

- engage in dialogue in relation to matters of faith and belief, both within and across, faith boundaries
- experience walking the pilgrim path
- share with others in the passing on of light, the experience of pilgrimage and a visit to another school
- reflect on being silent within a large group and the special environment of a sacred space

Cost:

Coach hire; entrance fees to Fountains Abbey (free for schools with membership of the National Trust)

Who is involved?

300 pupils with a wide range of abilities, mostly from years 5 and 6, together with teachers, teaching assistants and other adults. Pupils were drawn from 14 schools in rural and urban locations, mono and multicultural settings in the north of England. One disabled pupil was in a wheelchair.

Preparation:

A working group of teachers carried out detailed planning for risk assessment and the range of activities which were going to take place. Account was taken of the fact some pupils and staff would be involved in Ramadan fasting.

How did we organise the learning?

The day focused on bringing people together on the theme of journeying and began at a local primary school. After an assembly on symbols of belonging, for example a football scarf and a cross, pupils were divided into inter-school groups to play games and begin to break down barriers. Later, in the Cathedral, we were joined by a "pilgrim" in monk's habit, recently returned from the Holy Land. He described three artefacts he had been given – a Muslim prayer mat, a *kippah* and a cross. In small groups, pupils were guided round the cathedral and links were made between features of Christianity with those of Islam and Judaism. The morning concluded with a time of reflection and sharing of light in the sanctuary. The reflection was designed to be inclusive of all and pupils were very still. Following lunch, we followed the old pilgrim route to Fountains Abbey, with some of the journey in silence. On arrival at the abbey, guides involved the pupils in activities, including dressing as monks.

What was the impact of the experience?

The pupils said that they had enjoyed the sharing of light and the opportunity to get to know other children. Those from urban schools particularly enjoyed experiencing the countryside. Teachers from small rural primary schools recognised the value of such a day as perhaps the only way in which their children could meet those from other cultures.

Follow up:

This visit was the first of a year long project. It laid the foundations for establishing positive relationships and encounters between people of different faiths and developing a culture of respect for difference.

Contacts and links:

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Fountains Abbey <http://www.fountainsabbey.org.uk/education/education3a.html>