

Learning Outside the Classroom

When Strangers become Friends (3)

Encountering people of faith

Waterloo Road Mosque, Mandir and St Mary's RC Cathedral, Middlesbrough

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
- explore and investigate aspects of religious practice in the mosque and cathedral
- experience listening to music and ask questions about the deities in the mandir
- compare and contrast three places of worship
- recognise difference within a faith

Cost: Travel costs and donations to places of worship

Who is involved?

150 pupils with a wide range of abilities, mostly from years 5 and 6 with 50 teachers, teaching assistants and other adults. Pupils were drawn from eight schools in rural and urban locations, mono and multicultural settings.

Preparation:

A working group of teachers met to carry out detailed planning regarding risk assessment, working with partner schools and activities. All participants were briefed regarding the need to wear modest clothing and protocols about removing shoes. It was not necessary to wear head coverings.

How did we organise the learning?

The day focused on aspects of religious practice in three faiths and began in the mosque. After an introductory talk in the prayer hall, pupils worked in groups with children from their partner schools. Activities included examining prayer mats for the deliberate mistake, writing in Arabic and learning about washing for prayer. Towards the end of this visit, we were joined by the imam who demonstrated a *rak'ah*.

Following lunch, the short journey was made to the mandir. After being welcomed, the priest briefly explained the Hindu belief that many deities point the way to the one Supreme Being. Curtains were then dramatically drawn back to reveal the deities and the priest described who they were. Accompanying himself on the harmonium, he sang a hymn of blessing for the children, after which pupils went to look more closely at the deities.

Our third visit was to the modern St Mary's RC Cathedral. Gathering around the altar, on which bread and wine were laid out, the priest described the special meal which Christians eat. Children were able to look closely at the wafers. Pupils investigated different aspects of the Cathedral, including the stations of the cross and the bishop's chair.

What was the impact of the experience?

Teachers spoke of growing confidence amongst their pupils and how this enabled them to ask questions of pupils in partner schools on matters of faith and belief. Pupils commented about the contrast between the two cathedrals [See *When Strangers become Friends (1), and (4)*] and their amazement at seeing the Hindu deities.

Follow up:

This visit was the third of four in a year long project. Photographs and worksheets from the day were used as the basis to continue to investigate the places of worship visited.

Contacts and links:

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The Cathedral of Saint Mary, Dalby Way, Coulby Newham, Middlesbrough. TS8 0TW 01642 597750