

Somebody Else's Shoes

Plumstead Manor School: Helen Simpson

Purpose

- To develop students' ability to be able to access, express and record their own beliefs;
- To help students to understand their own beliefs within the context of the beliefs of others;
- To give the students the opportunity to work on an intensive programme employing critical thinking strategies in order to enter into philosophical debate;
- To use drama and performing arts strategies to vary the teaching approach;
- To deepen students' thinking beyond the realms of the immediate in order to help them appreciate different perspectives.

Main Emphasis

- Students from year 9 work closely with teachers and specialists from at least two different areas of the curriculum for a whole day. The day opens with a key question, '*Do I have to belong to believe?*' and students are introduced to the key concepts that focus their learning for the day, namely, '*practices and ways of life*' (AT1) and '*identity, diversity and belonging*' (AT2). Students investigate a number of questions about opinion, belief and belonging, both across and within religions and / or philosophies of life.
- Teachers will use multi-media resources relating to the Holocaust as published by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (<http://www.hmd.org.uk>) as a stimulus and a conduit through which students can frame ideas. The resources will stimulate discussion and ideas for role play which will encourage students to use creative thinking and writing to express their beliefs about and understanding of the responsibility of making a commitment to a belief.

School Profile

Total number of Learners	1,866 (years 7-13) 1,181 (years 7-11)
Age range	11-19 years
Specialist status	Performing Arts Vocational Studies Humanities (English, English as an Additional Language, Citizenship)
Level 5 and above in key stage 3 tests (2007)	54.8%
Five A* - C at GCSE (2007)	45%
Special educational needs	24%

At Plumstead Manor School we follow the Greenwich Agreed Syllabus, launched in 2004 and therefore due for review in the not so distant future. We currently start each KS3 year with a question; for example, in year 8 we begin with 'What is Truth?' and in year 9 'Does it matter how I live my life?' The different religious traditions are then taught as discreet units throughout the year. The RE Department was externally reviewed by the LEA in May 2007 in anticipation of Ofsted. We are aware of the non-statutory guidance and where appropriate make use of its format and content.

Question 1: What were we trying to achieve?

In the long term this is the beginning of an approach to teaching and learning which takes key concepts and questions and uses them to explore different religious standpoints rather than taking each unit from the basis of a world religion. The department will incorporate and revise the use of performing arts teaching strategies in order to cater further for kinaesthetic learners.

In the short term we aim for students to recognise that everyone has beliefs and values even if they may not recognise them as such, and that people's beliefs and values can have a powerful effect on their lives and on the lives of others. We aim to introduce the tools to enable them to recognise the process by which we all form beliefs and values.

What were our learners like at the start?

Strengths: our learners can recognise major religions and the basic characteristics of each. Most students accept that people have different religious beliefs and they are entitled to them as part of living within a diverse and tolerant society.

Weaknesses: students' experience of RE tends to be fragmented due to the previous structure of the programme of study and constraints on time. Some students find it difficult to recognise the value of everyone's beliefs, particularly of those whose beliefs or lifestyles are different from the majority, or of those do not, in fact, conform to any group or identity. We are also working with a number of white working class girls to improve their self-esteem and overall levels of engagement and achievement.

What differences did we want to see in our learners?

We wanted to raise the awareness of all our students so that they gain a deeper understanding of the place and power of beliefs in people's lives. We wanted the students to draw reasoned conclusions from multi-media resources.

We wanted to enable our students to employ critical thinking skills and use role-play and actor / teacher-in-role to make informed suppositions about the possible impact of one person's beliefs on another and to recognise value in their own beliefs.

Question 2: How will we organise learning to achieve these aims?

How did we set about making a change?

In order to engage students in some 'compelling learning', we devised a key question: '*Do you have to believe to belong?*' Knowing that many students enjoyed and requested more active styles of learning in RE, and wanting to make maximum use of our performing arts (PA) specialist status, we approached the performing arts department to see how a cooperative project might be developed.

In order that the RE learning was not compromised by the joint arrangements, we decided that there should be a specific RE focus across the two attainment targets. For AT1 the focus was to be on the key concept of '*practices and ways of life*' and for AT2 the focus was to be on the key concept of '*identity, diversity and belonging*'.

We decided to organise the learning around a curriculum day. There would be introductory sessions to 120 students at a time, then smaller groups would be withdrawn for seminars and discussions. Each student would carry a record book for the day and contribute to 'knowledge trees' to be fed back in the large plenary and evaluation session. The knowledge trees were drawn on large pieces of paper and students stuck ideas on post-it notes onto the 'branches' during the day,

Year 9 currently have a collapsed timetable to enable a full immersion day concentrating on RE. The time is broken down into 6 x 50 minute periods of intensive learning which would normally be spread over a half term. The sessions would be centred around students answering key questions:

- What are beliefs?
- Who has religious beliefs? Do I have them?
- How do we recognise our own beliefs?
- What do we mean by good and evil?
- Can my beliefs make a difference?

Peer assessment and group assessment would happen in feedback sessions at the end of the day during the plenary and evaluation when all seminar groups would present to the year group.

Resources, space and facilities

- Multimedia resources: access to ICT site was needed for some workshops;
- Multi-purpose theatre space – studio space and classroom equipment.

Cross Curricular Links

- Performing Arts
- English – Poetry
- History – the White Rose Society

The Curriculum Day

Session 1 Introduction

Students are introduced to the key question, '*Do I have to belong to believe?*' and to the key concepts on which their contribution to the day will be evaluated, '*practices and ways of life*' (AT1) and '*identity, diversity and belonging*' (AT2). They then participate in a number of warm-up games and are provided with a 'fact pack' and booklet to record their findings and thoughts.

Sessions 2-5 Activities

Sessions 2-5 will run all day with different groups so that the teachers specialize in teaching their lessons and teach it all day. The students experience these lessons in rotation.

Students are given a questionnaire two weeks before the curriculum day in order to ascertain their preferred learning style. This enables us to teach the kinaesthetic / visual students and the audio / visual students separately to enable them to learn predominantly through their preferred style.

Generally Kinaesthetic sessions are taught in a circle with few or no desks. Audio / visual sessions are taught in classrooms set out with desks in discussion groups.

Content Session 2

Participants and observers. Students are asked to look at a photograph of a Jewish man being paraded through the streets during the Nazi regime. Around his neck he wears a placard saying 'Even though I am a Jew I will not blame the Nazis'. He is barefoot.

The photograph is discussed in relation to such questions as:

- What do we know from the picture?
- What can we guess about people's religious beliefs?
- What do we think the Jewish man's faith means to him at this moment?

The interesting thing about the picture is the onlookers so that at this point students will be asked 'What strikes you about the onlookers?', 'What do you think they are thinking?', 'What if you were one of the onlookers; would your feelings be different or the same?'

Students record their responses in their notebooks.

Kinaesthetic groups are encouraged to recreate the photograph using people in a still image. The characters can then be tapped on the shoulder and 'thought tracked', that is, each student in the 'picture' gives his or her ideas on what their character may be thinking. Depending on the group dynamic all of the characters might be explored in this way (creating small spoken monologues) or the onlookers and the Jewish man can be the focus here. Facilitating this part of the lesson is where our link with the performing arts department becomes invaluable.

Content Session 3 –The red shoe

Students are shown a picture of a red shoe amongst the burned shoes at Auschwitz. Immediate responses to the picture are recorded and then discussed.

Students are then encouraged to think about who might have owned the shoe and what their belief system was. They are then encouraged to distinguish between assumption and what may be fact.

Then students are given some time to write a poem or monologue to be spoken about what this person was doing the day before they were captured. Based on the knowledge they have and on the gaps that they fill in with their imagination.

Key questions for this lesson:

- What does the phrase 'putting yourself into someone else's shoes' mean?
- Why is it important sometimes to try and do this, to try and think like someone else?
- How does understanding about someone's religious beliefs help us to do this?

Kinaesthetic sessions are run along the same structure but the emphasis is on spoken monologue rather than written poetry. This can be tried spontaneously and then converted and rehearsed as poetry or rehearsed prose.

Content Session 4

Why do we wear badges of belonging?

There are two main parts of this lesson. The first part is discussions about what this phrase 'badges of belonging' means. We look at some examples such as a turban, a soldier's uniform, a nun's habit and gothic fashion. We discuss the differences and reasons for wearing different items of clothing. We look at the reason behind wearing some of the items linked with faith and look at the verbatim statements from the nun in the picture about how it feels to wear a habit and what it means to her.

Content Session 5

Students are shown a TV advert for The Guardian first broadcast some years ago, called 'The Whole Picture'¹ about judging by first appearances. The advert is in three parts:

- The first part shows a youth running away from a car past a housewife in a doorway.
- The second shows the youth from behind running towards a man with a briefcase and grabbing him.
- The third part shows the scene from above. There is a large pile of bricks on a crane which is about to fall on the man with the briefcase. The youth running down the road pushes him out of harms way.

This lesson is about how we judge at first sight without knowing as much as we possibly can. At the end of each part of the film the students are asked to record and discuss their reactions to each of the characters and make judgments about the characters' belief systems based on what has been seen.

The time is spent discussing their predictions and the students justifying their arguments.

Kinaesthetic learners recreate the film physically and use a frame showing the camera angle. Thought tracking (see above) will also be a part of this lesson.

Session 6

Plenary

Students are reminded of the day's key question ('Do I have to belong to believe?') and they give their views based on the day's activities. They then write up their reports. The 'kinaesthetic learning group' perform the spoken thoughts from the Guardian advert. Some of the poetry is read aloud. Peer and group assessment of contributions is carried out and a record made for each individual.

G and T strand

In lessons 3 and 4 Selected gifted and talented students will :-

- Fast track the lessons about the red shoe and the Guardian ad.

¹ Available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMKScopMnKI>

- Use the ICT suite in order to collect and share information on the White Rose martyrs.
- Prepare arguments for and against and take part in the debate – ‘Religious martyrdom is irrelevant today and a waste of life.’

Optional Homework

Students are encouraged to collect images of what they think helps people to feel that they belong, and helps them to feel that they are an individual, giving reasons for their chosen images.

Gifted and talented students are encouraged to write a response to the statement, ‘For evil to flourish, it only needs good people to do nothing. Discuss’.

All committed homework is certificated and rewards are given to include in students’ record of achievement folders.

Question 3: How well have we achieved our aims?

Currently we have arranged the intensive RE time, the space and equipment. We are making key provision for G and T students to follow their own strand of study on this topic which is self defined (with expert guidance) at the start of the day. Performing Arts and RE teachers meet regularly and the bookings have been made for INSET for the department.