Pondering time with Year 5
at Norman Gate Special School.
Evaluation of Pilot: Summer 2021

Background

Norman Gate is a Primary MLD special school in Andover. The Year 5 and Year 6 classes took part. The project took place over a week's worth of topic lessons.

What we did

The children were given the opportunity to pick a concept/word that they had encountered and studied (learnt about) before during their RE lessons or RE days, looking at it again and thinking or 'pondering' on and with it a bit more. Once they had picked a concept/word they chose a religion or worldview to use as a context for their concept. They then framed a question that they would like to answer. The children were given a planning sheet to help them with all of this (available open access on Hampshire RE Moodle in Pondering Time resource section).

The children then followed the cycle as follows:

Communicate / Apply – bringing their attention to their experience

Discuss their initial responses to the concept and how it relates to their lives. Record their ideas through drawing, painting, drama or writing.

Share their experiences of and responses to the concept. Did everyone in the group have the same experience? How were they different?

Inquire: engage and study in an open-minded way

In groups pupils talk about what the concept means? Draw a mindmap to draw together any ideas you have about the concept or write a definition for a dictionary.

Contextualise: engage and study further

Research / find out how the concept is expressed in the religious context they have chosen.

Create something that demonstrates what they have found out. This could be through art, drama, music, writing, e.g. write a mini-book, recreate a celebration, make a model. Share their findings / creations with each other

Evaluate – discern value in what has been encountered and studied – both for the community studied as well as for themselves and their own lives

Talk about the importance of the concept/word for themselves. Some cognitively more able pupils could also consider the importance of the concept/work and what had been encountered to the people of the religious faith that they studied. Discuss why the pupils think it is important to have the concept in their lives? What would it

be like if they didn't have the concept in their lives? Do they all feel the same way about how important the concept is in their lives? How important is the concept for the people of faith or without they have thought about?

Examples of pupils' responses

One group looked at the concept of 'special object'. They wanted to find out why Sikhs use a sword. They drew pictures / wrote about their own special objects and talked about how they were the same and different. They drew a mind map to record their ideas about what makes an object special. They learnt about the Sikh kirpan and the 5 Ks. They were very interested in the story of the birth of the Khalsa and wanted to make kirpans and karas and act out the story. Some of the pupils were able to articulate that a kirpan was important to Sikhs because it reminded them of the story from a long time ago and that Sikhs needed to protect themselves.

One pupil who has autism and very complex needs also wanted to look at the concept of special object. He was interested in what humanism was and wanted to see if they had special objects. He also wanted to know if Christians had special objects and whether they were same as for Humanists. He identified that his special object was Mr Softee (a soft toy that he is very attached to). He found out that the cross, the Bible and candles are special to Christians. He also found that humanists do not have religious symbols, but do sometimes use candles. He painted a picture of two candles, one titled Christian and one Humanist. He could say that candles were important for Christians and Humanists, but he couldn't not really explain why.

One of the children of lower cognitive ability wanted to look at the concept of celebration. He is very interested in food and wanted to know whether Buddhist eat food during their celebrations. He was able to draw a picture of him celebrating his birthday. With help, he was able to find out that Buddhists eat vegetarian food during Wesak. He then prepared some vegetarian snacks and shared them with the class. With careful questioning he was able to say that he liked eating food when he celebrated and so did Buddhists.

Positives

- All of the children were very engaged by the idea of choosing what they were going to learn about.

- It was beneficial that the children could respond in the way that they wanted, e.g. through drama, cooking, painting.

- This approach seemed to help them with the evaluate step as they seemed to have a better idea of how the concept was important to the religions they had studied.

- Some of the children who worked in groups were able to work co-operatively – something they find difficult!

- Some of the questions the children came up with were good. Many of the children find thinking of questions difficult.

Challenges

- The children found the research / independent study element very difficult. They needed a high degree of adult input to do this, which is very demanding of staff time. During one of the research sessions we had a staff member away which made this even more difficult.

- We had very few books and resources for the religions that we do not normally teach.

- As an RE specialist I was able to ‘fill in the gaps’ where there was a lack of resources or where children found the research difficult, e.g. I told them the story of the birth of the Khalsa. Other staff who were not specialists found this more difficult.

- Some children did not want to work in a group, but instead follow their own interests. Whilst this was a good thing in many ways it made the management of the lessons more difficult, especially the research element.