

Object Connect Project



Introduction

The Faith and Belief Forum is a national interfaith charity that works across many different communities and institutions, and has worked in schools for over 20 years, iterating our methodologies, approach and activities on the ground. Our work equips learners with the skills and tools they need to handle and influence relations between different faiths and beliefs: learning the social and emotional skills to thrive in a modern, multicultural Britain.

At the heart of this project is the home learning environment and the engagement of parents and their children with five key artefacts or objects. With the support of project guidance and specially designed resources, they can investigate them in their own space: applying their personal knowledge/worldview as a lens to help appreciate their own and others' beliefs, practices and values. They will then use a survey to answer some pre-prepared questions that encourage them to think about the objects through this lens, without doing their own independent research about the object.

Pupils will also explore these themes at school with their teachers.

Background

With the 2018 National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) survey discovering that one in six primary schools had parents / carers asking to withdraw their child from religious education, and the lack of understanding of the worldviews approach also revealed by our research, a clear solution is the development of a model of learning which engages parents in their child's religion and worldviews learning process and associated engagement with their school. Instead of working in silos, parents, communities, Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), school leaders, policy makers and academics all want to understand what Religious Education in schools should look like and want opportunities to collaborate and support this learning more effectively. This was one of the findings from our research project developed in partnership with Inform and the Open University, funded by Culham St Gabriel's Trust (CSGT): www.faithbeliefforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Insights-Report-Final.pdf

This research highlighted our awareness that parental engagement is key to all pupils' learning in school, not just in recognition of the signing of the 'Home-School' agreement, including the commitment to support their children's attendance and / or the completion of school/ homework, but also influencing and affecting their children's attitudes to learning itself. Whilst all schools are required to provide information to parents about the RE curriculum, communicating what the children are learning in their classrooms, this project aims to encourage and support willing parents to do more: to actively contribute and enhance the learning of this curriculum.

Development

This project has been developed in partnership with schools, teachers, academics and RE advisors. The project ran its first pilot with 10 schools across London in 2023. The second pilot was conducted in 2024 with 20 schools across the North West of England and the West Midlands. We worked closely with lead teachers at many of these schools to establish more specific needs of the families, making the structure of the project work in the school context, to establish a co-designed, tailored approach. The resources and guidance developed is a result of the experience and guidance of all those involved.

Overarching aim of the project

Through this project we aim to support schools to effectively engage parents to enhance the teaching and learning of Religious Education in schools. We provide a learning model with resources which actively engage parents to work collaboratively with their children and teachers through an immersive educational experience that reflects the Religions and Worldviews approach (RWVs).

Why should your school get involved?

- To incorporate parents and caretakers' diverse perspectives in the teaching of RE
- Explore innovative approaches to teaching faith and belief through objects
- Develop your parental engagement strategy

What will it entail for your school?

The main commitment from your school will be in terms of time. Teachers will need to work through the three self-guided training PowerPoints; source the objects; design and plan the best approach for their school / class; engage and support parents; and planning the classroom activity. However, this is a flexible project, and schools can adapt the project to suit the needs of their parents, children and staff.

Project structure

- Teacher self-guided training
- Planning & engagement strategy
- Recruitment of parents & sourcing objects
- Parents taking turns to take objects home in rotation and completing surveys
- Collation of parent-child home surveys
- In-class exploration of objects with students
- 'The Big Reveal' Multicultural event in school for all participants
- Review & Reflect

Teacher Guidance

Teachers will have access to self-guided training through PowerPoints and guidance sheets. These support teachers to think about how to best adapt the project to their school context; support parents to engage in the activity with their child in the home; and with developing pupils' skills in the classroom when considering and reflecting upon the beliefs and values that are explored as part of this learning.

The self-guided training is in the form of three PowerPoints which include a focus on the worldviews approach; coordinating the project and sharing resources; reflecting on the project in school; developing, learning strategies and resources for the classroom; and preparing for a final interfaith / multicultural event.

End of Project Multicultural Event

The project will culminate in an in-school celebratory multicultural interfaith event, where the meaning of these significant objects with an organised religion / worldview will be revealed, and where any further classroom activities that pupils have been involved with, can also be displayed (each object has an attached video of a person talking about their use of the object). As part of these events, parents / participants can be invited to share and talk about any other objects, foods or even photos which hold symbolic or religious significance to them.

This event will provide the opportunity for parents / participants to further engage with effective interfaith / intercultural dialogue in recognising shared similarities and connections. This not only promotes community respect and cohesion, but can also be an opportunity for mirroring, modelling and enhancing the effective classroom learning experiences of RE through the Real Worldviews approach. The event does not need to be big or extravagant, it could be as simple as a coffee morning, parents evening or inviting parents into their child's RE class.

Further Reading

The project was informed by research which highlighted the importance of engaging parents in their child's worldviews learning and associated engagement with their school. If you are interested in learning more, you can access the report here:

www.faithbeliefforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Insights-Report-Final.pdf

To hear more from parents, children and teachers who were involved in the first pilot of this project, follow this link, which will give you more of a taste of what it's like: www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XOfzAcwT4