

Report for Westhill Endowment Trust September 2018

Shared Space: encounter, conversation and interaction in RE

Summary

This project built on the previous Shared Space Project which resulted in creating a Teacher Toolkit and resources which were shared at the NATRE Strictly RE Conference in January 2018.

The aim of the project is to transform the classroom experience of pupils within Religious Education **by improving teachers' capacity to promote good community relations through lessons in RE.**

The kinds of contacts needed when people are brought together across cultural divides in order to bring about improved community relations need to be better understood; it isn't enough simply to occupy the same public spaces.

Recent research conducted by NATRE and academics at Bristol University, and generously funded by the Westhill Trust, devised and administered a national survey of teachers of RE and analysed the findings. As a result, we understand more clearly and robustly ways in which RE lessons may promote better community relations where these follow three distinct and pedagogical steps: encounter, conversation and interaction; and where RE teachers receive wider institutional support from senior leaders in schools and others. With the support of additional funding from an ESRC IAA Impact Award, a series of local RE teacher group meetings took place in 2016-17 raising awareness of the 'Shared Space' project across the country and the findings of our consultation have been developed into a teachers' toolkit which was launched at the Strictly RE National RE Teachers conference in January 2018 and is on NATRE website at this point.

The teachers' toolkit is publicly available here:

<https://www.natre.org.uk/uploads/Additional%20Documents/The%20Shared%20Space%20Folder/teachers%20toolkit%20final%20April%202018.pdf>

Other publications to make our findings accessible to practitioners and policy makers include these:

Christopher, K., Orchard, J., & Williams, A. (2018). Promoting Good Community Relations: What can RE Learn from Social Psychology? RE Today

McKeown, S., Orchard, J., Williams, A., & Christopher, K. (May 9, 2018). Using contact hypothesis in RE. SecEd Magazine. <http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/using-contact-hypothesis-in-re/>

How RE lessons can reduce prejudice and improve community relations (April 9, 2018). University of Bristol News Page (internal press release). <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2018/april/re-lessons.html>

McKeown, S., Orchard, J., Williams, A., Wright, K., Christopher, K. & Jackson-Royal, R. (2018). Encounter, conversation and interaction: Improving community relations through religious education (February 2018). University of Bristol Policy Briefing 56. <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/improving-community-relations-through-religious-ed/>

McKeown, S. Williams, A. & Orchard, J. (May 24, 2018). Five ways to celebrate diversity in the classroom. TES. <https://www.tes.com/news/five-ways-celebrate-diversity-classroom>

To maximise the potential of these new insights we sort to educate a larger pool of teacher leaders, for example NATRE local group or LTLRE hub leaders, and RE consultants willing and able with support the toolkit to educate their peers through local group/hub meetings

Our follow up project

This specific project involved the organisation, delivery and evaluation of a 24-hour residential professional development seminar for 24 stakeholders in RE, including an RE Today Services consultant, 6 RE teacher leaders, 6 RE consultants/advisers, and SACRE members to promote dissemination of the findings of the Shared Space research project, including the teachers' toolkit.

Kate Christopher (RE Today Services) and Kathryn Wright (Independent Consultant) developed the seminar with partners at Bristol University.

The focus of the residential was to explain the research to participants and engage them in extended discussion, including critical reflection on potential limitations or shortcomings of the research, to make sure they are able to understand and apply the findings to RE practice and feel equipped to lead training on the toolkit with others.

The three grant objectives were:

- Improving the professional knowledge and understanding of teachers of RE in relation to improving community relations through the formal and taught curriculum
- Disseminating successful examples of best practice in this area and accounting systematically for their success based on robust evidence
- Developing the leadership capacity of non-academic partners, in particular local group leaders, to educate others nationally in the use of teacher friendly resources and policy briefings

The residential built upon the considerable success of work undertaken by NATRE and the University in partnership over the past 18 months. The work extended a 'knowledge exchange' bringing together a unique combination of expertise that was both theoretical and practical.

Our progress

The residential had four specific aims:

1. To help teachers acquire an understanding of the contact hypothesis
2. To explore whether the contact hypothesis could be of use for RE
3. To explore as a diverse expert community whether and how this branch of theory could be of benefit to the classroom
4. To engage on a practical level with the Teachers' Toolkit

The first afternoon/evening introduced questions about the nature of community cohesion and religious literacy. In addition, teachers were supported in developing their understanding of contact theory.

The following morning the Shared Space Project was set within a wider context of the purpose of RE as religious literacy, and teachers heard from Dr Amanda Williams about contact theory and its applications. The three elements (encounter, conversation, interaction) were then explained in depth, with examples given of each element and why we felt all three were required in order to promote good community relations.

Teachers heard from three different expert witnesses Dr Jo Pearce, Dr Norman Richardson, Dr Janet Orchard and Jo Malone. They each provided a 5-minute response to what they had heard so far from their own perspective. Each of these witnesses then hosted a table and teachers took part in a 'knowledge exchange' carousel. This involved teachers in groups of about six engaging in conversation with the expert witness for about 15-20 mins before moving to another hosted table. This provided an opportunity for teachers to share their own expertise and knowledge with the witnesses, develop their own thinking, considering wider educational possibilities and next steps.

What we achieved

Initially, some delegates were already aware of insights the shared space team had gained through creating the Toolkit, such as importance of criticality and the need to address teachers' own knowledge and confidence. Community or diversity was accepted as not just religious and school-based at the outset which enabled all participants to engage fully with the project. Therefore, the idea that this is not just a task for RE was acknowledged at the outset.

The principles of contact theory were evident in initial responses from the delegates at the start of the residential: the need for meaningful and genuine collaboration between groups, the fact that socio-political issues need to be acknowledged and a sense of positivity that contact can, under certain conditions, enhance relations.

At the end of the residential, the majority of delegates felt that RE can and should be utilized to improve community relations. However key warning notes were raised, such as the need for RE teachers to be vigilant to their own biases and stereotypes found and reproduced in RE resources. The absolute need for structural and whole-school support was

communicated both initially and at the end of the residential. Evaluations indicate that the residential made teachers more aware of the level of complexity involved. It was felt the 'knowledge exchange' carousel contributed significantly to this outcome.

Overall, the 3 elements were received positively as both comprehensible and potentially effective. It is interesting from the evaluations that the element of 'encounter' required most further clarification, when our initial results indicated that teachers were using encounter by far the most. Many suggestions were offered, such as developing training and publishing resources, that could be implemented with funding. As a first step, it seems that the theoretical and practical thinking behind this project makes sense to teachers and causes them to think critically about their practice and understanding, thus further areas of development emerge.

The need for whole-school and leadership support is abundantly clear. Potentially the clarity the Toolkit brings to connections between RE and community relations could help individuals make clear requests for support to leadership.

Using the delegate evaluations, we consider the grant objectives to have been met:

- Improving the professional knowledge and understanding of teachers of RE in relation to improving community relations through the formal and taught curriculum. Teacher evaluations show this objective has been met. However, evaluations showed that further work may be needed to help teachers understand the interdependency of the three elements (encounter, conversation, interaction)
- Disseminating successful examples of best practice in this area and accounting systematically for their success based on robust evidence. This objective was met through the knowledge exchange carousel and particularly the work of Generation Global. The Teacher Toolkit provided practical examples for teachers to use in the classroom based on the previous Shared Space research.
- Developing the leadership capacity of non-academic partners, in particular local group leaders, to educate others nationally in the use of teacher friendly resources and policy briefings. Evaluations showed that teachers had a desire to share what they had learnt with others. Some proposed sharing the toolkit in teacher training that they ran, some planned to share the toolkit through their multi-academy trusts and others through local networks.

A copy of the teacher evaluations can be found in the appendix.

Next Steps

The University of Bristol and NATRE are continuing their partnership through a new ESRC Impact Acceleration award for 2018-19. The aim of this is to extend the significance and reach of the research nationally and internationally. The plan is to extend the use of the toolkit through teacher networking in the UK and Hong Kong, and to evaluate its impact.

In addition, members of the Shared Space Team are speaking at the 20:20 RE Conference in October and at the Church of England Diocesan Advisers Seminar Day in November. The latter will focus particularly on the value of the knowledge exchange carousel, as well as the teachers' toolkit.

Dr Kathryn Wright

Member: NATRE Executive

On behalf of the Shared Space Team

Appendix:

Teacher Evaluations Summary

INITIAL THOUGHTS AT START OF RESIDENTIAL

(a) Can RE improve community relations?		
YES	NO	MAYBE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes but not on its own, all education should be aiming for this • Yes, RE has a special, but not unique role • Yes but not just in education, many areas of society can work towards this • Good RE can unpack stereotypes, explore the idea of 'others' and gain religious literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With levels of social inequality and a hysterical press, is it possible? • Community relations is not just about religion- but all groups in society • Not if it is bad RE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If it's to do with interpersonal relations rather than what pupils are taught, no • Teachers need to be knowledgeable and confident to challenge stereotypes • Political and social forces cannot be divorced from content in RE

(b) What sort of contact or interaction in SCHOOLS can improve community relations?		
TEACHING	COMMUNITY	To think about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include hidden diversities, question assumptions and stereotypes • Think about how inclusive schools actually are • Seating arrangements • Initiate purposeful dialogue • Criticality matters • Collaborative, interactive activities • Experiential learning • Deep Talk • Has to be deliberately planned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite parents from diverse backgrounds to read with pupils, as well as talk about culture/ religion • Outside visitors; faith as well as diverse jobs and specialisms • Visit places of previous conflict, learn about it • Exchange students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of contact • Contact with who? • Are we talking about behavior as well as diversity? • Community is something we live and experience, can't be taught • Does the immediate community need to be diverse? • Whole school should be thinking about how it

		engages with community
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(c) What sort of contact or interaction in SOCIETY can improve community relations?		
INTERACTION	ETHOS	MEDIA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street parties, visits, conversation, arts and sport, • Collaboration with a purpose, shared goals • Meeting real people in shared, fun places • Not just religious, but secular shared spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not just about 'magic moments', about a whole approach to society and others • Not an 'add on' but fundamental • Deep contact, not superficial • Requires confidence to talk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • virtual/ digital communication • the world is global • language and bias in media prevents positive exposure • how will technology change interaction in future? • How does modern technology change culture?

(d) SHOULD RE be utilized for the purpose of improving community relations?		
YES	NO	MAYBE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RE can raise the profile of community and diversity • All areas of the curriculum, including RE, have this responsibility • Yes, through providing religious literacy→ deep understanding, connections • Yes, in gaining skills to connect and listen • This is a specific responsibility of RE • Improved community relations should happen anyway through good RE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RE can contribute but should not be utilized • The school community may be more influential than individual lessons • Whole school responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should all or no subjects be 'utilized'? • Can RE be about community relations and be academically rigorous?

AFTER EXPERT WITNESSES AND KNOWLEDGE CAROUSEL

How far do you agree with the 3 elements?

- 'Encounter' needs further explanation. And elucidation eg what does E look like in Secondary?
- All 3 elements could be clearly defined at start
- Does encounter require a multicultural / multifaith setting? Is it possible in monocultural settings? This could be defined
- Agree with all 3 elements, recognize the elements
- Intend to use all 3 elements, welcome chance to test them out

- E difficult in Secondary with the knowledge-heavy curriculum
- Time to reflect on the elements also important- to be built into their application
- Agree not just in the classroom but in the community

Which of the three elements do you use most?	
ENCOUNTER/ CONVERSATION	INTERACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in time terms- encounter and conversation - at KS4- the encounter is with subject knowledge - more time at KS3 for conversation - encounter and conversation (several people) - E and C are easier than I - Encounter→ imagined contact, case studies, with different world views - Use E and C earlier in the year, I requires more maturity and understanding - Use E and C most, even in a multifaith school- need to work on achieving I - Hard to separate, use different emphases at different times - Encounter is a crucial first step - Need to ensure encounter is not reinforcing stereotypes and prejudice - Encounter still requires planning and a positive outcome - Would like to see these elements modelled by an adviser 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not so sure about I - Three elements could be presented as connected/ Venn diagram- each element is most effective in connection with others - I significant for meaningful community cohesion - I is more difficult - Does I require the class to be diverse? - All three vital for Godly Play and Deep Talk- facilitator is trained - The 'golden moments' are when I occurs

Does application of the elements depend on context?

- Yes- needs whole -school, SLT and wider community support- religious, socio-political context of school and community is important
- Yes- needs to address real contexts in school, not just a tick box exercise
- Technology changes context- brings people together whatever their local context, context is global
- Application of E requires resources and teacher confidence, also depends on local context
- Yes- need to be alert to specific context for community cohesion
- Yes- depends on age/ stage of pupils and local context
- Yes but the overall theory (contact theory, 3 elements) applies to all contexts
- Yes, because context doesn't always allow an equal starting point, which has to be addressed
- Yes, depends on relationship with class, support of school, etc

How effective are the elements in their setting?

- Very much dependent on commitment of other RE colleagues, whole-school and leadership. Eg technology can implement contact, but this needs to have support and resource.
- Top down structures need to be put in place
- Only effective in a minimal way without wider and consistent support
- Effective in the classroom, but it can't stop there. Needs to be whole-school

- It depends on the setting- all three elements could be stimulated on a visit, in the classroom, possibly just E and C.
- Effective in pushing deeper than knowledge required for an exam
- Very effective- if applied with sensitivity and intelligence
- More opportunities to understanding and explore I required, for teachers and students

AT END OF RESIDENTIAL: 'WHAT'S NEXT?'

Challenges to current practice/ attitudes

- Think about difference between RE as community relations and RE as understanding
- Think about why we teach RE. We claim it reduces prejudice but there is no evidence. Share this theory with students
- Explore the idea of teachers' capacity to collude with or disrupt power relations
- Need to try stuff out
- Need to identify and share good practice. Good practice will be diverse
- Be conscious, be aware, uncover own bias

Values underpinning RE

- Encourage greater emphasis of empathy in RE: in ITE, in religious symbols as universal memes, towards those being learned about, from religious leaders, in demystifying myths and stereotypes, in experiential learning, in considering human connections
- This work applies to all community settings, and all ages. Eg intergenerational contact
- Godly Play/ Deep Talk- funding for research on how it promotes community relations, seems to be effective in Finland, recently introduced to UK

Further developments

- Money, support. SLT support, put community relations on school agenda
- More research, teachers as researchers, collect evidence, trial resources and approaches
- Bring pupils into the conversation
- Develop a pilot project- a sow in line with contact theory
- Develop and share teaching resources, INSET to share with colleagues/ across MAT
- Cross-curricular support and interest
- Develop contact theory CPD/ teacher training
- Need to grow a community in our local contexts-not just our own classrooms
- RE Today to publish the Toolkit

- Could teacher training support the elements directly, ie bring teachers into contact with others in a collaborative environment, in a sort of teachers' Generation Global?
- Share with our education, academic and faith networks and contacts, including overseas!
- Set up action research projects to test the Toolkit in different settings
- Produce guidelines for teachers keen to use the Toolkit
- Share with different faith networks, faiths to support the creation of resources which support the Toolkit
- We all go and work on this and come back together in a year!