

A New Global Schools Programme – Face to Faith

What is Face to Faith?

Face to Faith www.facetofaithonline.org is a schools programme run through the Tony Blair Faith Foundation www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org.

It is a compelling educational programme that engages students of different faiths and none across the world in learning directly with, from and about each other.

What are its main aims and objectives?

1. To increase religious literacy between students of the different faiths, beliefs and cultures.
2. To foster religious tolerance amongst diverse faith, belief and cultural groups.

How does Face to Faith work?

Using video conferencing and an online community, students of different faiths and none work together to investigate specific global issues; discuss a range of opinions, values and beliefs; and explore the reasons for similar and different views. By learning about those of differing social, cultural and religious perspectives, young people build their awareness of the role of faith in their life and in the lives of others.

When was Face to Faith launched?

Launched on 9th June 2009, the following schools participating in a video conference with the Rt Hon Tony Blair to discuss the positive role of faith in fostering peace:

- o Indian Heights School, New Delhi, India
- o Hope Flowers School, Palestine
- o Westhoughton Community College, UK

Is Face to Faith trying to convert people to religion?

No. Face to Faith is designed to improve young people's religious literacy which is a key skill in today's global society. It is not teaching into religion but about religions and world views which are important for young people to understand if they are to be global citizens and share experiences in a world where differing viewpoints and perspectives are key features of everyday life.

Is Face to Faith trying to create one global, lowest-common-denominator religion?

Addressing this issue Tony Blair himself said at a speech at Westminster Cathedral in 2008: *"The Foundation will expressly not be about chucking faith into a doctrinal melting pot. It is not about losing our distinctive faith. It is about learning, living and working with*

"Face to Faith is an amazing platform to teach our school children tolerance and respect for other religions. It gets them to think about the major religions of the world and hopefully learn to understand them. Being in contact with their counterparts from other countries belonging to different faiths will certainly broaden their minds and will definitely help in stretching themselves out of their own belief systems, at the same time help them to work together to solve the 21st century problems.

Religion is a sensitive subject and the teachers are wary of talking about any kind of religion in the classroom, but thanks to Face to Faith, it is a perfect setting for interfaith dialogue; to address cross-cultural understanding and break down religious barriers. Religion has the capacity to inspire intolerance but it also has the potential to play a constructive, not destructive role. We would like to explore different religions' capacity to make a positive contribution to the community and the world at large. I personally feel this programme will make the students into global citizens and they will be able to look at the problems and solutions of the world as one."

Ms Simmi Kher, Indian Heights School, New Delhi, India

others of a different faith.” Face to Faith is designed to encourage young people to recognise the similarities between faiths and more importantly to respect and deal with the differences between diverse and sometimes conflicting worldviews. Face to Faith provides young people with the necessary skills and tools that are required for dialogue across a wide range of issues and helps to equip them to live in a world of diverse faiths and communities.

Will the Face to Faith programme, whether intentionally or not, convert children to a different religion?

As set out in the programme’s principles, Face to Faith is designed to educate, not to convince or convert. Good, effective learning creates understanding, overcomes prejudice and establishes an invaluable and unique opportunity for reflective dialogue. There are many paths to truth. We don’t have to agree. We can challenge. But we can only communicate and grow if we respect each other’s opinions.

“It is an honour for Amman Baptist School to be a Lead School for the FTF programme, for ABS views this opportunity as a means to enter a world of a different faiths, cultures and backgrounds.

The best of what FTF has to offer is the chance for students to engage with other students which are different in many aspects and on different levels and find common grounds for growth and development.

As educators we believe that our circle of influence will ripple to students and expand to the whole community whilst we learn to accept others as they are; and, unify in achieving ultimate goals concerning universal issues that relate to all mankind.

ABS is keen to ally with many schoolsWe are so energized and excited ...”

Ms Carol Jadoun, Amman Baptist School, Amman, Jordan

Surely Face to Faith is only relevant in those countries where religious education is taught in schools?

On the contrary. Face to Faith has been developed by an international group of educational experts who have devised a flexible programme that contributes to a range of curricula subjects from the humanities, religious and cultural studies to social sciences. The programme can be used to support the project component of the Global Perspectives IGCSE offered in 140 countries by Cambridge Assessment and aspects of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme.

What age group can take part?

Currently the programme is aimed at 11-16 year olds.

Doesn’t this programme just impose a Western perspective on schools involved?

The programme has been devised by an international group of educational experts to ensure that it reflects the needs of school systems around the world. It has been devised as a flexible, modular programme so that it accommodates a wide range of learning requirements and starting points. Face to Faith is always keen to incorporate and endorse ideas from other perspectives that foster reflective thought and contribute towards dialogue, debate and tolerance.

Face to Faith relies on video conferencing. Isn’t that expensive technology which limits the engagement to well-endowed schools?

The Face to Faith team is working closely with the Global Nomads Group and Polycom, both experts in video conferencing, who provide all schools interested in the Face to Faith programme with

free access to the appropriate video conferencing technology. The minimum broadband requirements are 284kps. Video conferences can run with less bandwidth, but the quality is much poorer- audio delays and low resolution images. To ensure optimum quality of video conferencing exchanges Face to Faith currently operates in those countries with a stable broadband infrastructure.

How are the needs and interests of students without a particular faith or belief addressed?

Face to Faith is uniquely structured to encourage young people to investigate big global issues; to share their opinions, their personal beliefs and values; and to explore the reasons for both similar and different perspectives. In this way, it is as much for those who have a religious faith as for those who do not. Our aim is always to acknowledge, respect and make use of the plethora of perspectives at hand in order to enrich student life. The programme is designed to support, encounter and exchange between those of different faiths and none, with the aim of improving understanding and respect for differences in worldviews.

In which countries is Face to Faith currently operating?

Face to Faith is currently engaged with schools in the UK, US, Canada, India, Pakistan, Singapore, Indonesia, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Jordan and Australia. By 2012, we aim to be in at least 15 countries worldwide and working with over 630 schools.

Is Face to Faith solely for those fluent in English?

Face to Faith syllabus material is currently circulated in English and Arabic. Interestingly, many schools find that Face to Faith is a useful contribution to their English-language programmes as it provides the opportunity for Non native speaking students to practice their English language skills.

How are the teachers with no religious education training able to teach this programme?

The authors of the Face to Faith Programme are acutely aware that very few teachers around the world will have had explicit experience of teaching Religious Education. Face to Faith hosts a two day teacher training workshop to guide teachers through the programme and address any challenges they may face in its implementation. A comprehensive set of lesson plans and resources designed by educational experts that can be adapted to suit teachers' needs are also provided.

Face to Faith offers a continuing programmes of teacher training workshops in each country. Further materials are available through the online community, and we encourage teachers to work together to form supportive communities within each region.

How much does Face to Faith cost a school?

Currently, Face to Faith is offered free to schools including the installation of video conferencing software.

“St. Thomas the Apostle School became involved with the Tony Blair Faith Foundation due to its international expression and basic tenet in purpose. The underlying conflicts that thread our society are escalating and only through educating our youth will change occur.

My hope is for my students to gain a greater appreciation for differences that exist in our world and transform this appreciation into action -actions of service, aid and charity expressed to others from different cultural and religious backgrounds. I hope to connect with The Hope Flowers School in Palestine due to the wonderful experience I had in meeting these educators in London. Also, the schools from Great Britain due to our historical ties and of course India due to the vast difference in culture with India.

Face to Faith has the ability to connect today's youth with each other to design a true global community. It is my hope that this connection will provide my students and all the students involved with the tools to be successful citizens of our planet living in peace and harmony.”

Ms Christina Teisch, St Thomas The Apostle School, New York. U.S.

What skills will students learn through the Face to Faith program?

Face to Faith will help students develop verbal, oral presentation, research and problem solving skills as well as confidence to present their own perspectives and opinions. The program is innovative as it positions students as active researchers, enquiring about different faiths and as providers of information, sharing their own experiences of their faith. In this way, the program gives students an agency and voice in their own learning. Moreover, Face to Faith will introduce new video conferencing technologies into the classroom and give students the tools to communicate with their peers across the globe. Finally, the program is designed to highlight both similarities and differences between people from diverse faith and cultural backgrounds. Learning how to cope and to accept differences will help students to develop empathy, thereby enabling them to interact peacefully in their own communities and beyond.

How much have parents been consulted, and were there any objections to their children being involved in this programme?

Parents have been widely consulted in the development of the programme in order to be transparent and to ensure we address any concerns. In our experience when parents have learned more about the programme, they recognised its huge educational potential and accepted the participation by their children. Indeed, it has led to further co-operation. Two of our Lead Schools in Canada and Palestine are arranging video conferences between groups of parents in their schools to help improve understanding about the programme and about each other.

How is Face to Faith being evaluated?

Professor Robert Jackson and a team of researchers from the World Religions Education Unit at Warwick University UK are carrying out an independent evaluation of the programme. The team will use both qualitative and quantitative data collected from online discussions, activities and video conference dialogue.

In addition, we advocate the use of self and peer assessment in the classroom so that both students and teachers can measure the success of the programme. Face to Faith facilitators will hold regular evaluation sessions via videoconference with both students and teachers in order to collect further evidence of how successful Face to Faith is in increasing religious literacy and raising religious tolerance.

To find out more about the programme contact Dr Leila Walker at the Tony Blair Faith Foundation
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