



# Ealing RE Network

## Spring Term 2008

[www.egfl.org.uk/religion](http://www.egfl.org.uk/religion)

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**Welcome** to the spring 2008 edition of the RE network newsletter.

**Website update** New schemes have been posted on the curriculum pages of the website. At key stage 2 there is a scheme for the core unit on Sikhism and at key stage 4 there is a scheme on the nature of belief. Two new key stage 3 schemes (“Belief and practice: overview” and “Moral dilemmas, II”) are linked to the Thinking Worlds RE module, a copy of which will be distributed to secondary heads of department at their meeting on 7 March.



*Thinking Worlds™ RE module,  
virtual church environment*

**Vasant Panchami**, also known as Saraswati puja, is the festival dedicated to Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning. In the ancient Hindu text the *Rig Veda*, Saraswati is represented as a river deity. At the time when the Vedas were written, worship was primarily performed on the banks of the river, with sacrifices consigned to Agni, the sacred fire. When the Saraswati River dried up in the 4th millennium BCE, the landscape of ritual and belief also underwent transformation. In the *Upanishads* it was said that the gods entrusted Saraswati with the task of taking Agni to the sea. Prior to this time, the sacrificial fire had been seen as the sole link between humans and their deities. But when Saraswati completed her mission, the ritual of sacrifice came to be replaced by a sacrifice of self through the pursuit of creativity and knowledge.



*Saraswati,  
Hindu goddess of learning*

This year Vasant Panchami occurs on 11 February. In India schools will be closed for the day, allowing students to participate in temple festivities. Considered to be a particularly auspicious day for the beginning of learning, parents often choose it to teach their children their very first words. As in the illustration, the goddess is often depicted holding the *veena*, a musical instrument similar to a sitar. *Sara* is the Sanskrit word meaning ‘essence’, and *swa* means ‘self’, therefore seeking to manifest our creative power—to be ‘in tune’ with it—could be seen as a suitable devotion to this goddess.

### Network meetings

**Primary subject leaders:** Thursday 28 February, 4-6 pm, EEC Room 18. “Religious education through drama and storytelling” with Emma Vane of Questors Theatre (RSVP by 15 February)

**Secondary subject leaders:** Friday 7 March 2008, 1-4 pm, EEC Room 9. “Teaching RE to mixed-ability classes” and “The impact of the new secondary curriculum on RE” (RSVP by 22 February)



Contributions to future newsletters are welcome. Please post or email to: Nora Leonard, SACRE Consultant, Strategy and Improvement, Perceval House P2: NW, 14-16 Uxbridge Road, London W5 2NL ([nleonard@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:nleonard@ealing.gov.uk))

## What makes a good RE co-ordinator?

Teachers spend much time working to plan B, C or even, on occasion, plan Z. In a crammed timetable there are many weeks in which one lesson or another is squeezed out and, as RE is often an area in which teachers lack confidence, our subject can become the Cinderella of the timetable. How can we support colleagues so that they feel confident and even look forward to teaching RE?

Although I teach all the RE at my school (West Twyford Primary), that is quite a recent turn of events. Seeking advice, I trawled my colleagues for their opinions of what had been particularly important to them in terms of support from a co-ordinator. These are some of their replies (I also asked them to prioritise these ideas).

- *Make and keep things simple.* Teachers lack time so make as few demands on their time and energy as you can while still ensuring your subject is well taught.
- There can be a *fear of causing offence through mistakes.* None of us wish to offend even inadvertently and it might be helpful to give colleagues a list of some of the differences between faiths that can lead to misunderstanding.



Word art 'M' (Hansa font) used as stand in representation for the prophet Muhammad

Two examples that might come up are that it is important not to ask Muslims to draw a prophet (I use an initial made in WordArt if I want to represent a prophet on a worksheet). Again, Muslims do not believe Jesus died on the cross and when teaching the crucifixion, this should be courteously acknowledged, perhaps with the explanation that Muslims and Christians share the belief that Jesus will return to earth.

- Linked to a fear of causing offence, is *anxiety about lack of knowledge* in a curriculum area with a wide knowledge base. Children are likely to ask questions we cannot answer. As co-ordinators we cannot know everything about the subject but we should know how to access information needed by our colleagues—I wonder how people managed before the internet and Google! To anticipate this, it might be useful to give your colleagues the list of useful websites that will shortly be posted on the [Teachers' Room](#) page of the EGfL RE website.



- The vocabulary of our subject is often new to children. It is very useful to have *pictures to show of artefacts* such as a sefer Torah, font or prayer wheel. A range of pictures can be found through Google images and saved centrally on a network. It is also useful to order picture cards such as those available for the various faiths through the [Articles of Faith website](#). These and other pictures offer good opportunities for paired sharing and, when children share with a larger group, all participants can see an image of what is being talked about.
- Finally, because you might be asked for information or a resource at very short notice, it is *important that all resources are organised* and that information in files is easily accessible. This will also allow you to reasonably expect people to return items borrowed from the central resource, rather than requiring you to do it! (I am notoriously disorganised so I feel embarrassed writing that suggestion, but my disorganisation is the very reason I have to be sorted—well, as much as anyone who is a teacher can be!)

Judy Johnson, lead practitioner in RE (primary)