



## **'If we were to ever open a restaurant this would help us to have a good business!'**

**Elizabeth Wayne**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This short article discusses a set of secondary RE classroom activities exploring issues around food traditions in modern day Britain.

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The entrepreneurial spirit is live and strong – not only in Business Studies lessons but in Religious Education! For some 11- and 12-year old students I suspect this is the set of lessons, maybe together with the topic on Fairtrade and justice, which they are most likely to remember out of all their first year of secondary RE! The reason for this is food of course, Fairtrade bananas, chocolate and other products, and, for potential cooks and chefs, the whole area of food and the community.

Showing the diversity within and between religions needed to be a prime aim of the task to be devised. Quite clearly there are many food requirements and restrictions that religiously-literate young people need to have an awareness of in order to be equipped for a 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Even if they do not remember all the details from faith traditions, they do need to have the opportunity to develop awareness of the issues and how they might impact on their future working and social lives. The tasks would need to be differentiated and authentic to the diverse local community with its range of faiths and traditions. Lastly, the skills and understanding would need to be assessable in some form.

Firstly, a set of stimulus quotation cards was prepared. The less fluent reader could undertake a smaller number of cards and still get a range across religions by reading brief quotations from a young Hindu, Christian, Sikh and Muslim. A more demanding task approached internal diversity within religions, so the stimulus cards showed more comments from young people who, whilst in the same religious tradition, had different ways of interpreting food traditions – including the Catholic Christian who did not eat meat on a Friday and had family grace before meals, another youngster who declined sweets in Lent, the girl who went to a church with a Fairtrade policy for refreshments after Sunday morning worship, and the Hindu who avoided all meat, onions and other stimulants and another who would never eat beef but might eat chicken. The recording grid required careful pair work to extract answers and use the information to then respond to a birthday situation and other tasks.



The birthday situation was a task in which students had to decide what was an appropriate menu for the birthday of a Muslim student with Hindus and Christians amongst the guests. Earnest questioning involved wanting to know if it was during Ramadan as this would affect the timing into the evening, or if it was in Christian Lent, as sweets and chocolate cakes might be a temptation! The sensitivity was strong. One pupil used the information on one of the examples of internal diversity and wanted to know if it was a Friday or not, picking up on the tradition amongst some Christians of avoiding meat other than fish on Fridays. Some students wanted to know if the Hindu was strictly vegetarian or views about halal food. All these details highlighted the internal diversity within religious traditions and the importance of not stereotyping people into categories that may not be accurate. Whilst some students opted for a safe option with a cheese pizza and, a near universal favourite, birthday cake, possibly eggless, others were quite imaginative in their birthday celebration menu!

In classroom conversation students talked about experiences when they had been unsure of the content of food dishes – meat or vegetarian samosa? What’s in the little pie? What’s in the sandwiches, and why are they on the same plate as meat foods, and so on? From this evolved the task of creating a brochure to include advice about food to help cooks, people in hotels and in catering to understand the food rules and traditions of some people in Leicester so they can plan meals that are suitable for their customers and guests. Some of the advice, such as keeping meat and vegetarian dishes separate and labelled, would apply to any school or community event and were quickly identified, as was the suggestion to have a bowl of fruit available. Examples of good ideas to help all the guests enjoy a meal included the simple, ‘Keep meat and vegetarian foods on different plates’, and the more searching, such as details about different traditions amongst Hindus to highlight that some avoid onions, ginger and other stimulant flavours.

Students soon picked up the need to understand the internal diversity, to avoid stereotyping and to be aware of the differences. ‘Remember there are different views in some religions’ was a frequent phrase, supported by examples, in their written work.

So, as teachers might say, this is a learning opportunity to develop community cohesion within RE. And as these Year 7 students would say, ‘If you are doing a dinner party you would know what to serve without hurting people’s feelings,’ and, ‘You might make more profit if you have a larger range of customers!’