

## An Introduction to Face to Faith - for Parents.

### What is Face to Faith?

Face to Faith is the global schools programme of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. It allows young people to learn about different cultures, faiths and beliefs, by talking directly with one another using facilitated videoconferences and a secure online community. Through this direct, safe, and supported communication young people are able to move beyond their preconceptions to build genuine understanding of the things that are important to their peers around the world. At the same time it gives them a voice to explain their own priorities to others. The discussions enable students to move beyond superficial ideas about each other's faiths, beliefs and cultures by giving them the tools for respectful dialogue; which enable them to deal maturely with profound and important issues. Face to Faith provides schools with a rich selection of teaching resources, developed by an international panel of experts, to help them prepare students for meaningful dialogue.

Face to Faith talks about culture and identity, but always emphasises **Faith** and **Belief**, because those two things can play a very positive role in our world, yet are almost always referred to in a negative way. We want to help young people understand the diversity of worldviews that contribute to shaping the globalised world that we inhabit.

A common remark from teachers following conversations with parents is that after years of their children coming home and not saying much about school, many now have learned first-hand about Face to Faith from their children wanting to share their experience with their parents. Following extensive feedback from teachers in our first Italian schools, teachers remarked how many parents had contacted them to thank them for Face to Faith as their children were involving them in what they were learning. Parents in India have remarked that, after fruitless years of trying to interest their children in their Hindu tradition and heritage, Face to Faith was the catalyst that actually drove their children to actively seek that engagement out - to understand it more fully, so that they could explain it to their peers in other countries.

### Why are we involved?

We are excited about engaging our students with Face to Faith because we believe that it is a programme that offers unique opportunities to enhance their education, and prepare them for life in the globalised world of the 21st century. Globalisation is often understood as a force that seeks to press everyone into the same mould, but the power of Face to Faith is that it emphasises and



celebrates the diversity that makes the world so rich - the elements that make our cultures so unique.

Face to Faith is an excellent way to help students build their cross-cultural understanding. The young people we are teaching today will need the skills and understanding to be able to live in, and negotiate their way through a world of diverse faith and belief. It is important that we prepare our students for the experience of diversity and conflicting views in school. We can support them as they develop the skills to take part in meaningful dialogue. This means that while they interact respectfully, they do not avoid disagreement, but are empowered to find a middle ground between the extremes of confrontational conflict, and surrendering their principles.

## What do people say about Face to Faith?

"Students are becoming more self-confident and more open to other cultures. The project was applied for about two months but we can sense the change in their characters and their feelings of acceptance and respect to other people regardless to their religious or cultural backgrounds". School Coordinator, Jordan.

" Respecting others' faith does not mean that you disrespect your own faith. It opens us to others" Student, India.

"I have learnt that my way of life is not the right and only way to live. To see another's life helped me to appreciate mine. Face to Faith is an important program because it helps me see another's way of life". Student, Australia

One teacher explained her classes' experience - after expressing very negative views about the other country in the run up, and start of the videoconference, " the genuine interest and curiosity in my students grew tremendously. They asked all sorts of cultural/religious questions, were fascinated by the answers, and in the end of the VC, one student stood up and told his Indian counterparts, " I thought xxxxxxxxx was so religiously and culturally diverse; it's nothing compared to your country!" While reflecting on the experience, there was a common feeling of shame that they felt at their original viewpoint and racism".

"After 30 years of engaging in Religious Education with the goal of promoting interfaith dialogue among different religious traditions and peoples, I have finally glimpsed a way forward without parallel. This clearly a brilliant idea whose time has come." Professor Harry Stout, Yale University