A reflection area for your school

Samantha Fletcher shows how an infant school in Oldham transformed a corner of a room into a reflective area and transformed the quality of children’s reflection as well.
Sam Fletcher says: “As an RE Coordinator I think good quality RE knows that children crave exploration of new concepts. Given a suitable environment they will cement their knowledge and understanding. We’re passionate about providing excellent and enjoyable RE and this influenced the creation of a communal space for reflection for use by the whole school. This undoubtedly embraces AT2, learning from religion. We started with a dull corner of a room.”
Creating a reflective area provided an ideal opportunity for children to engage with all world faiths. Children learn about and from specific religions. Some which aren’t in the syllabus get overlooked or time does not permit for further exploration. In the reflection area, all religions matter.
We decided to develop this project as a class. It was crucial to understand what the word ‘reflect’ actually means. Our Year Two class definition is: ‘**To think about something carefully**’ ‘Reflect’ became our word of the week and a greater understanding of reflecting became apparent within all the children. We talked about what we could reflect on and even though the space would include many artefacts and resources from a specific world faith (each half term one of the six major faiths is rotated into the area) it was an area where we really could think about the ‘ultimate questions’, life’s biggest posers.
Utilising the interactive whiteboard, the whole class was able to list suggestions to the question: ‘What would you like to see in this reflective area?’ The children are very respectful of all artefacts and resources within the school and as a useful reminder the children decided there should be some ‘rules’ for using the whole school area. We defined this as ‘How to keep happy in this area’. All children wrote their ideas and we then selected a number of them to be displayed.

The whole project was a collaboration of ideas from children and staff and once the ‘space’ was chosen the ideas from the map were put into action.
The Artefacts Table.

An area to arouse interest and intrigue about the religions we are learning from. Artefacts set amongst sparkling fabric and rope lights.

Include an arrangement of flowers reminding visitors of the beauty in our world.
The Creative Section

We have a selection of pencils, crayons, post-it notes, clipboards and paper with a label stating ‘BE CREATIVE’. Pose the question ‘What are you reflecting on today?’ Display a selection of small boxes for the children. They can write their thoughts on paper and place in the box. The box can be kept with them whilst they are in the area. Old jewellery boxes will do. Offer the idea that ‘If you have an unhappy or sad thought write it down and throw it away’. The concept here is that the children may feel relieved of this burden once the thought has been thrown away.
The Question Box. Take an old box (the A4 paper delivery boxes are excellent as they have a removable lid) cover it with bright paper. An old letter box cover is a nice touch, but you can just cut a hole in the side. Tell the children that they must write their name on their question otherwise the answer cannot be returned to them. Staff could take it in turns to regularly check the box. It doesn’t matter if you cannot answer the question fully, you can always direct the child to the library, the internet or the deep mystery of life!
The Wish Tree.
This is the wish tree, to which you can peg a blossom with your ‘wish for the world’ written on it. The tree has been made using a large cardboard tube and covered with brown tape. The leaf structure is made using wire coat hangers carefully wound around the trunk and covered. We have a very creative Nursery Nurse to thank for ours!

Once complete, you need to pre cut blossom shapes and put some pegs in a basket/small box at the foot of the trunk.
For all people to love.

Victoria
Some music. Reflection is an activity that music can enable. We have put a CD player and some still and reflective music CDs in the area. Children can choose silence or to listen – to whale song, violins or worship songs.
Stained Glass Window Effect.

Paint the windows and the overall effect will really add to the ambience in the area. If you haven’t got specific glass paint you can use pearlised paint mixed with PVA glue, like we did!
The Tent – A Place To Escape!

The tent was built with an attaching broom handle secured to the wall! This is a place where the children can sit. It has a magical aura to it, with the use of a bright fabric outer layer and a mosquito net inner layer.
Candles give children a possible focal point. The children love the lava lamp: they can watch the bubbles. The rain maker absorbs the senses, making this a good item for reflection. All aid the calming and relaxing feeling which is sought from the area.
A table and two chairs can be very purposeful. Aspects of role play can be introduced here. The resources can change on the table dependant on which religion is the focus for example, Buddhism – Make your own Lotus flower. Christianity – Harvest, Communion and the Lords Prayer. Hinduism – Take a virtual tour of a Hindu Temple. Islam: Build your own Mosque using dough. Judaism: The Shabbat table. Sikhism: Make your own Turban.

Sense of touch: Feathers, pom-poms, stones and shakers can all be held and felt. The sand timer is another good resource for focusing thoughts.
Display Board. An interactive display that is bright, colourful and attractive. The centre piece can be a candle with the following words written in large letters: ‘Come into our quiet area to reflect and enjoy’ We have symbols that represent the six major world faiths. An arrow points to the selected religion at that time.
Having a book case to display faith related books, information books, posters and photographs is ideal. to include a ‘thought to reflect on’. This can be a quote, short verse or something from the press/media.
Festival display table.
This takes us beyond artefacts and into what religious people do. It can be changed often, so there is fresh information for every season of the year.
You may like to add a ‘Peace Chain’ around the display board like we did. Each child at your school can create a link in the chain and write on their link the answer to the following question: ‘What do you think would bring peace in our world?’ We gave each year group a specific link colour, once complete join together and display.
Remember…

**VAK:** The reflective area takes into account the needs of visual, audio and kinaesthetic learners

**Dirt:** Give the children a tray to store their shoes in before entering the reflective area. This promotes the feeling that the area is special and should be treated with respect, for everyone’s benefit.

**Big Questions:** Around the space display jigsaw pieces with ‘ultimate questions’ written on them. The children can consider their responses to the questions whilst in the reflective area.

**All in:** The reflective area doesn’t just allow the children to experience ‘awe and wonder’ moments… the teachers also get to experience them too!