

Permeable Walls (KS3 Study) – Information Sheet

Bridging the boundaries between subject compartments

Permeable Walls is an exciting research and curriculum innovation project being run this year in secondary schools for Year 7 students by the Learning about Science and Religion (LASAR) research centre at Canterbury Christ Church University. The aim of the project is to develop students' understanding of different ways of knowing and how they interact by bridging subject compartments.

This information sheet provides some context on the project and explains what the project will involve for the schools that take part.

Epistemic insight

Permeable Walls is part of a wider education initiative called Epistemic Insight, which is being delivered across multiple HE institutions and is led by Canterbury Christ Church University (see <http://www.epistemicinsight.com/>). Epistemic insight means 'knowledge about knowledge', and particularly knowledge about disciplines and how they interact.

At LASAR, we are particularly interested in helping students to explore Big Questions using more than one discipline. One way that we characterise Big Questions is questions about human personhood and the nature of reality. For example, 'can a robot be a good friend?' or 'why does the universe exist?'. Students typically enjoy thinking about these kinds of questions, but often they are not addressed in schools because they bridge subject boundaries and do not have simple or agreed answers.

What is Permeable Walls?

As part of Permeable Walls, LASAR researchers will work with teachers to implement learning activities for Year 7 students aimed at developing students' epistemic insight and curiosity in Big Questions. For example, getting students to consider the question 'why did the Titanic sink?' from both a scientific and an historical perspective could enable them to better understand how knowledge is formed and tested in each of these subjects.

For each school, up to 10 teachers from six different subjects will work together to deliver learning activities over a five-week period during Terms 3-4. Most of these activities will be embedded in the school's existing programme of study. We also encourage including one or more multidisciplinary workshops that have been developed as part of the Epistemic Insight initiative which would be supported by LASAR researchers. Exactly what the learning activities are and how and when they are implemented is flexible depending on the needs of the school.

In the first instance, we are keen to meet with teachers to share resources and pedagogical tools for teaching epistemic insight and to carry out preliminary research to collect baseline data. This will contribute to the school's staff continuing professional development (CPD). We will then work with schools that want to implement epistemic insight learning activities over five weeks and carry out further research using surveys and interviews. For more information and examples of the learning activities and resources that have been developed as part of the initiative, please see [The Epistemic Insight Framework for Key Stage 3](#).

Research

The research we carry out will involve a maximum of two surveys administered to all participating students and teachers. With some schools, we will also ask to carry out interviews with a smaller sample of students and teachers.

Ethics

We will seek written consent from each of the teachers who decide to participate as well as the school's Head Teacher.

For the student surveys, an 'opt out' form will be sent to parents/carers to use if they not want their child to take part. The form is 'opt out' rather than 'opt in' because the study is deemed to be in the public interest, no real names will be used in the reports and because the findings will help teachers to teach more effectively. For student interviews, an 'opt in' consent form will be provided for both parents/carers and the students who are invited to participate.

Confidentiality

All personal information will be stored securely within CCCU premises for only as long as necessary, in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as well as the University's own data protection requirements. Participants' names will not appear in any research.

How will participants' responses be used?

The findings of the research will be used internally within Canterbury Christ Church University to inform and develop this project and related activities. In addition, the data will be analysed and the results will be discussed in the form of papers and presentations which we plan to submit to conferences and to journals.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?

Taking part in the study provides a valuable opportunity for staff CPD and to develop innovative new pedagogies. There are no disadvantages to taking part in the study, other than the time commitment required to carry out the stages of the research outlined above. Each participating school will receive a contribution towards survey administration costs and travel for conferences and CPD.

Who has reviewed the study?

The research project has been approved by the University's Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee.

Any questions?

If you would like more information about our research and/or research ethics please contact the Principal Investigator, Professor Berry Billingsley on berry.billingsley@canterbury.ac.uk or the LASAR team at lasar@canterbury.ac.uk, Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, CT1 1QU. Tel. 01227 767700.