

Life in Modern Britain

The Contribution of RE

Joyce Miller

Gave a quick overview of the REC and CoRE; after that she gave a quick overview of where she got to with RE and discussed the issue of who owns RE. Whether it is the faith communities or the professional bodies, and she suggested that the divide was not helpful. The world is not binary as we so often see it; it is not religiousity vs secularity; globalisation vs atomisation; clash vs community; convergence vs divergence; leave vs remain; them vs us.

Peaceful collaboration and co-existence are possible. The impact on RE is: avoid generalisation & stereotypes; avoid religion and beliefs as silos; address conflicts between & within religions; examine perceptions and misperceptions and focus on the commonalities and collaborations as well as the differences.

She recommended that RE should help children to discuss and consider what it means to be human, and what the contribution of being human is to the essence of belief. The big questions of life and what we do.

There needs to be a discussion about the purpose of RE and the whole relationship between SACRE, Religion & belief and RE.

It was not clear quite what our response should be as far as she should be concerned. RE was about teaching children about multiple identities. Just teaching them about a faith does not help improve the impact on counter racism and anti-religious feeling.

The question of who should be on SACRES was raised and Joyce suggested several categories that could be included – governors, free schools, academies, parents etc. She wondered whether NASACRE exec should reflect a similar make up.

The issue of which subjects RE should have parity with was also raised and as was the question of who owns education and who should own RE and education? Interestingly there is no single view about this or about whether SACRES are working.

Commissioners from CoRE are available to come and talk to SACRES if invited.

There followed an activity asking how SACRES are engaged in trying to improve quality & rigour in RE, and whether it has the capacity to improve life in modern Britain.

As I knew three of the 5 SACRES around the table, and the rep from Kent did not know much about what was going on, this was less useful for me than it might have been, but hopefully if the answers are shared then it will be valuable in the long run.

Aaqil Ahmed spoke enthusiastically about the role that media – particularly TV can support Religious literacy, but only if the broadcasters have strategy and remain rooted in reality. Christianity is not dead, as the West often views it and the decline of religion in general is not recognised by every nation. There needs to be a recognition of the demographic change that has taken place and religious literacy needs to help the non-religious navigate the world of faith and those of faith to navigate the world around them. If there is a vacuum of knowledge, there is space for prejudice to enter.

It is important to see this as part of a learning journey – the programmes are there and they address the issues of the Big questions of life. Religious broadcasting is the most important genre, and there should be a breakdown of viewers and listeners about religious affiliation, not just gender and race.

We need to recognise that we are in a hyper-diverse society; he referred to the anecdote of Steven Gerrard warning the Muslim medic of the team about the champagne spraying and removing his kit before so that it did not get alcohol on. The message that RE is not dead or irrelevant needs to come across clearly.

There needs to be a structure that says that religion is a must have is essential; aspects of religion that are relevant needs to be explored and it needs to come into other subjects, such as history and art. It needs to be visible and picking up current issues.

We need to be aware that there are other illiteracies – media, political etc.

The religious illiteracy of students is being picked up; this is especially the case where students, particularly Muslim students, live at home rather than go away to uni. This has implications for community cohesion.

There were then questions to a panel, including Charles Clark as well as Joyce and Aaqil.

Q1. Where are the boundaries on fuzzy edges in RE?

CC referred to whole school ethos and ethics and discussed the issue of the place of RE in school. Should it be a separate or should it govern the way that schools operate? How do Head Teachers and governors see it?

Q2. What are the most important steps we can take now as SACREs to support RE?

CC suggested that we build and use networks and relationships in local area and try to develop religious literacy across the whole area, this is difficult in areas where the LAs have been diminished. SACREs need a strategy

JM recommended that SACRES celebrate good RE and congratulate areas of success; schools are good at doing this, SACREs need to do it as well. She also suggested that we promote REQM and encourage schools to share good practice with other centres as the Gold Award requires.

Interestingly she also talked about getting children on visits.... 85% teachers said visits were a great idea but only 8% actually did it. Help make contact between children and faith communities. ***This is encouraging for Berkshire - look at Crossing the Bridges!***

AA reiterated the need to plan a strategy in conjunction with local schools

Q3. How do we get people who control education to value RE?

CC said that this is a key issue - raising the standing and interest in RE is critically important and thinks that having a national advisory board on RE is needed. The status of RE is not high enough. All problems stem from this. Most politicians won't risk getting involved so the religious communities particularly the C of E need to raise the status.

Q4. If you had £1 million to spend on religious literacy, what would you spend it on?

AA would use it to get more money as £1million isn't enough and he would want to make religious literacy integral to everything; i.e. embedding RE into the whole curriculum.

JM would seek to improve teacher training, both in ITT and CPD and would want to get the child back into the centre of education. She also recommended that the background of the child needs to be taken into account as equality is not sameness.

Q5. How do you raise the profile of RE at university level?

Paul Smalley reminded people that universities provide a service over which they have little control. He suggested amending part 2 of the teacher standards so it reads to not only uphold British values but to develop religious literacy. Schools and Unis would then have to ensure that there was ongoing CPD

Q6. Religious literacy, is it always educational and educative?

JM stated that there needs to be a common understanding of what religious literacy is

AA suggested that people are actually getting more religious literacy out of 'Citizen Khan' than documentaries. A great documentary is only great if someone sees it! It's the visibility of the material that make the difference.

Then there was the Business meeting; papers are available for the various reports.

I left before the end of this part of the meeting.

What do I think are the key messages for SACRE?

We need to ensure that we do not lose the impetus of the Crossing the Bridges Project; the interaction between schools and faith communities is clearly an essential to improving religious literacy

We need to develop a strategy for raising the religious literacy within our area. This needs to be done in conjunction with the schools and the LA (this will be a serious challenge!). We also need to decide what religious literacy means in our LA

We need to ensure that we keep ourselves as SACRE members religiously literate and trained in the key areas of SACRE responsibility

We need to find a way to celebrate school RE successes; this means we need to find out what they are doing