

What's the Place of Faith in Schools?

Wednesday, 22nd February 2012

Duration 1:45:10

GCSE	
AQA	Religious Studies A: Unit 2 Religious Studies B: Unit 5
Edexcel	Religious Studies Units 1-7
OCR	
WJEC	Religious Studies B: Unit 2
A level	
AQA	Religious Studies: AS Unit H
Edexcel	Religious Studies: Units 1-4
OCR	
WJEC	Religious Studies: RS 3 CS

This is a Faith debate featuring Charles Clarke, James Conroy, John Pritchard, Linda Woodhead, Richard Dawkins and Robert Jackson. It focuses on the religious education and collective worship in schools.

Students could be given the same issues as used in this debate and asked their opinion on them prior to watching the discussion, revisiting them later to see if any of the views expressed had caused them to change their minds. For extension work students may focus on the importance of RE in a world where God seems to play an ever-decreasing role.

This programme is suitable for use with A level students studying philosophy, ethics, and religion and society. For high-achieving GCSE students this could be used to look at religion and equality and the importance of ecumenism in a multicultural / superdiverse society. However, the debate is quite long and it would probably be sufficient for one lesson to listen to the four opening presentations. The Question & Answer section could be a useful second lesson or make worthwhile extension work.

Questions for debate

What place – if any – should faith have in our state school system, and in our schools – in both the formal curriculum (what is taught in the classroom) and informal curriculum (wider ethos of the school, including assemblies)?

Conclusions from the debate

There was a new settlement between religion and state school education in Britain in 1944. Since then changes have been implemented in a piecemeal way, attempting to keep pace with the rapid changes in religion and society. This has led to situation of crisis today which is evident in:

- Controversy over the existence of 'faith schools'
- Inadequate teacher training to deal with faith
- Confusion about the requirement to hold acts of worship in all schools
- Patchy RE (Religious Education) teaching and degraded status of RE in the curriculum

There is an urgent need for joined-up thinking about the place of faith in schools and a new settlement as radical as that of 1944.

Research Findings

Faith schools vary widely in nature – they cannot be categorised as a single group. Research shows many to be of high quality, with demand continuing to grow. Many are now taking Academy status. Faith schools' admissions policies remain contentious.

The research uncovered serious problems with the way RE is taught in secondary schools. Although compulsory, RE is:

- under-resourced
- squeezed in the curriculum
- outside the Eng Bacc (Ebacc), and not always considered a serious subject
- subject to local variations in syllabus, and highly variable in quality
- no longer guided and resourced by Local Education Authorities, which are in crisis.

The research nevertheless finds examples of excellent practice in some schools, and student demand for RE has been growing strongly.

The statutory requirement to hold Acts of Worship 'of a predominantly Christian character' is widely ignored, and there is often fear of dealing with religion at all. There is widely varying practice across schools – from no collective gatherings, to banal notice-giving, to reflective spaces. Primary schools often deal better with Acts of Worship than secondary schools.

As always, after watching the discussion, it is worth returning to the students' views to find out if and how their personal opinions have been influenced or changed by what they have heard.

After discussion, if there is time, it would then be worth watching the 25 minute summary to clarify and crystallize the thoughts and views expressed.

Pdfs concerning the law and the first two presentations are available on the webpage under Resources.