

How to do Deal with Religious Diversity in Classrooms- A Teacher Training Course on Religious Diversity in Intercultural Dialogue and Gender Issues, Alexandria, Egypt, 20 - 24 November 2006

REPORT

Introduction

This was a most interesting course in which people from many different backgrounds and cultures were able to meet and discuss aspects of religious diversity and intercultural dialogue. Many good friendships were made. I should like to thank the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) and the Council of Europe (CoE) for the opportunity to attend, make my presentation and lead working groups.

Opening ceremony

Welcome by the Goethe Institute (Mrs Nivin El Sioufy) to Alexandria

Welcome by Anna Lindh Foundation (Dr Traugott Schoefthaler, Executive Director) – importance of dealing with cultural diversity (we accept the importance of biological diversity); not just a question of knowledge but of attitudes and skills. There is great disparity between the official position of states promoting intercultural dialogue and the actual state of knowledge and empathy among the population in Germany. It is also ironic that the most diverse education about religion is given to those who opt out of (church controlled) RE lessons

Introduction by Professor Aly El Samman (Head of Dialogue and Islamic Relations Committee, the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs):
importance of avoiding generalisations (not all Muslims, all Jews are the same);
still not succeeded in bringing the message of inter-faith dialogue from the elite to the public at large – needs a big effort; must start with the state, but need the media (especially TV); we need a way of making links between people rather than institutions; culture sounds too refined!
Religion is still a very sensitive topic and we need a lot of courage; we cannot make everybody happy, but we hope later generations will say how we dared to engage with it.
There is no monopoly of the words of God, or of faith in God, or the place of the followers in God's eyes. There is no monopoly in professionalism about religion – it is for all to be able to speak; importance of reading, understanding and then speaking;
Importance of tolerance – violence cannot solve our problems.
There is no confrontation between religions themselves, but between political usages of them; love can be a big solution!

Welcome by Josef Huber (CoE)

Background to CoE lies in state of Europe after WW2 – European Cultural Convention (1954); big emphasis on intercultural dialogue and intercultural education (49 in Cultural convention, 46 in Council itself); diversity always been part of CoE within and beyond. Anna Lindh Foundation is key partner with ALEXO for cooperation with Arab states.

There is a strong investment in teacher training, eg Pestalozzi programme; these are important because of face to face encounter.

Diversity is here to stay – cannot be like ostriches; has always been around; religion is a part of this – issues of practice, truth and morality; we have to learn to live with this diversity if it is to be a peaceful, sustainable (socially and economically) world (under threat from many things).

Needs the participation of everybody, including both genders, all faiths etc Things change, so imperative is to make change happen for the better; need a common core for living together.

Role of education is paramount, in and around the classroom, and in society; four types of knowledge (facts, competences, attitudes, how to learn); how to understand multiple identities – human, nation, religious, cultural etc

Welcome by Jan Henningson, Director of Swedish Institute

Parable of 5 blind men and the elephant from the Buddha (truth), but problem of the parable is that the narrator is in a place of overview, omniscient wise one; teachers are not like that!

Is the most successful teacher like the nun in Birmingham (?) some time ago working on multi-faith units – like conducting an orchestra? Or is she one whose own faith pupils could not work out, because she empathised with all faiths? Or like teachers of poor Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, India, who bring them together so that eventually they eat and visit together; children learn 4 alphabets connected with the four religious traditions involved – there is no limit to the ability of young children to learn multi-traditions; or a teacher in Sweden faced by difficult teenagers in a poor area, who got her pupils to bring their own religious stories to school with them, and then she connected them in a teaching aid.

Need open-minded and fair presentations – the image of the other in school books can be a problem both in Europe and in Arab countries; most successful models are where pupils can present themselves faithfully but without imposing value judgements – only then can we talk about mutual understanding.

Welcome by Dr Ahmad Dorrah, Al Azhar University

Nothing presents a greater threat today than the misinformation and misunderstanding of religions

Humans are more united by what they have in common than divided by their differences

Need to cooperate to promote shared values and better international relations Spirit of enhancing tolerance and dealing with religious diversity; God's will that humankind is diverse (words on entering Makkah); many Qur'anic verses are like that.

My Presentation: The Importance Of Intercultural And Inter-Religious Dialogue
"intercultural education and religious diversity" the project of the Council of Europe: its main conceptual ideas and examples from the reference book for teachers

Slide 1 I am very honoured to be able to make this presentation to the conference today. I am pleased to have the opportunity to describe a Council of Europe (CoE) project with which I have been closely involved since 2002. This is the project on "The Challenge of Intercultural Education today: religious diversity and dialogue in Europe". The project is about to result in a publication for schools across Europe that may contribute in some way to furthering intercultural dialogue in our continent - Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: a reference book for schools (Reference Book). Before I go further I want to pay tribute to the work of my colleagues on the project group. Any outcomes from the project are due a collaborative effort by many experts across many countries.

Slide 2 Time does not allow me to go into detail regarding all aspects of the project and its development. My purposes are to disseminate information about the project, raise conceptual and other issues that have to be faced by teachers and trainers in this area, and to consider the nature and implications of the examples of current practice contained in the Reference Book.

Slide 3 Let me briefly remind you of the project's origin. Intercultural Education (ICE) has been part of the nature and work of the CoE from its beginning ('organisation of values' - human rights, rule of law, democracy). Much very good work has been done (languages, history, Roma-gypsy, citizenship), but the religious dimension of ICE has been largely absent, and now taking it seriously as the Council has done, has not been easy. It is to the credit of the Council that it has managed to do this, and more, for it has helped to develop into new thinking and work for the Council on Intercultural dialogue. The project was propelled by important factors for all Europe, indeed the whole world; The resurgence of religion in human affairs, particularly in Europe - not new for many others in the world, for it had never been absent in many places (as Grace Davie shows) but unexpected to many in Europe, and, it must be said, for some, unwelcome; 'the elephant in the room'! terrorist violence - not new but linked to extremist religious views (a phenomenon not confined to one religion), in particular the events of 9/11; new thinking within the Council on intercultural education and its elements, including the project becoming part of the Building stable and cohesive societies programme; white paper - leading to Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008.

This new approach has been necessary, not just because of the shock waves of 9/11 but because of the interconnectedness of religion with culture, values,

lifestyles etc. We see evidence of this interconnectedness in tensions and conflicts in many parts of Europe, and in particular issues, such as the wearing of religious symbols which has caused controversy in more than one European country. The nature of the values often taken for granted or assumed in Western Europe is now more contested and high on the agenda of debate. I could have brought acres of news cuttings from the British press that illustrate both the extent of coverage of religious matter and the issues that arise of an intercultural education kind. Religions are not static but dynamic.

Slide 4 Our project realised the need to examine the roles of religion, religions, and religious diversity, and their contribution to intercultural education as potentially parts of the solution to intercultural problems (for example, problems of destabilisation, tension and potential conflicts within and beyond European societies), and not just parts of the problems themselves.

Slide 5 Education, as the Council has always realised, is also a central part of the solution to intercultural problems – though neither easy nor quick. Educational change is often slow, involving cultural shifts and changing mind-sets; it can be often fragmented, and difficult to get consistency of policy and practice across diverse range of traditions, histories and systems. The work of the project has involved many discussions with many officials, experts and committees, and involved representatives of many member-states, For example, in Paris in 2003, a conference of experts identified a wide range of issues and questions that the project has since tried to clarify and take forward.

Slide 6 I also need to mention the significance particularly of the Oslo Conference in 2004. You can see the fundamental agenda that was addressed and enabled the preparation of the Reference Book to go ahead. As you will understand, the project group had to grapple with complex issues of intercultural, religious, and educational theory on which people are seldom agreed, and may never finally agree. The group was, however, mindful of the need for practical outcomes of its work,

Slide 7 The Athens Declaration of 2003 was also a significant milestone as the Education Ministers of Europe decided to make ICE an important priority for further work. The group had to produce a product that could meet the needs of teachers and schools in different places and traditions. The Reference Book is one of the most important practical outcomes, based on a common agreement on theoretical and practical perspectives, and is intended to be of practical use to schools and educationalists all over Europe, whatever their type of school or national context – something for all!

Slide 8 The Reference Book moves from theory to pedagogy to practice – both whole school and exemplified. Without such an underpinning, the more practical sections of the text would lack context, rationale and direction. Similarly, without the practical section the Reference Book would be very limited in its effect and influence. I should like first to outline the theoretical

underpinning of the religious dimension of intercultural education, with which the Reference Book begins.

There are many conceptual points in the first section, and all of them can be contested, to a certain extent. The concepts represent thinking from different places and philosophical perspectives so total agreement is always unlikely. I want to mention Slide 9 first, a concept of religion as a cultural phenomenon. For many, if not most people, religion is more than this, of course. Religion may be a way of life, an embodiment of revealed truth, and/or linked with important ethical convictions. It is not the place of the Council to decide on these matters, nor does it have the capacity should it unwisely seek to do so. However, this bald concept provides a basic agreement on the nature of religion that allows the Council to begin to develop further the implications of religion for ICE, and to release the potential for considering how religion can contribute to positive ICE that would not be possible otherwise. For example, this concept recognises the emergence of secularisation in much of Western European society in the past 100 years. It must be said, however, that some are now talking of Europe not as a post-Christian society but as a post-secular society. The reasons for this are themselves complex and debateable, but no one can doubt that religion is a cultural phenomenon (or set of phenomena) that is of significance in all European societies still. This concept also allows the scope of religion to include humanist view points as well as theistic ones. This is particularly important in Europe where there are many people (and children) who do not have traditional religious, theistic beliefs yet have beliefs and values. I am quite fond of saying that there are no neutral people; there is no objective standpoint in life; there are no non-believers; we are all on some square of the board game of life's values. ICE needs to be inclusive of all the squares.

A second important concept is the recognition that the role of religious, philosophical and moral convictions go beyond the private sphere. Again this is not without its opponents, but without such a concept the potential of exploring and using the religious dimension of intercultural education and dialogue is very limited. Personal convictions do influence public participation; personal beliefs do cause public motivation and policy direction; religious affiliation does contribute to social movements, institutions and civic life – all these examples show have a consideration of the public roles of religion are relevant for ICE.

A third point is equally basic – that manifestations of religious diversity are to be found in schools across most of Europe. This goes beyond visible religious symbolism (though that is often the most eye-catching and public) to diverse views on authority, duty, morality, and destiny for instance, which different religious and non-religious groups hold deeply. Intercultural education should ensure that it nourishes an understanding of such things, not just of visible diversity but also of diverse world-views, as part of the fundamental educational interests of children and young people. More than that, “such education needs to develop a personal autonomy and a critical spirit,

tolerance, openness to diversity and a feeling of belonging to the community as a whole. It should also nurture a sense of trust, uniting citizens beyond their ... differences ..." Such education accords with human rights, democracy and the rule of law – hallmarks of the Council's values.

Slide 10 The aims of such an intercultural education that takes the religious dimension into serious account are:

- first, tolerance. This word can have a weak or strong sense. In its weak sense tolerance is rather passive, meaning 'putting up with'. We have taken the strong sense of considered awareness of the convictions of others and respect for others as having equal dignity. "Enhanced awareness of the religious dimension should be aimed at ensuring that each child ... is able to acquire a positive sense of identity without fear of being judged by others." Tolerance is a concept you may wish to discuss later.

- A second aim is reciprocity – a readiness to acknowledge or grant to others the same things one would like to see acknowledged or granted for oneself, including not offending and being offended. This concept embodies a core value of ICE – that we have much in common as well as difference; in unity as well as in diversity. Much of what we want for ourselves is what others want for themselves.

- The third aim is civic-mindedness, not an easy concept to convey in different languages and societies; it breaks down into, first, a capacity to stand back, and reflect on one's own and on others' beliefs and values. This is very important for education as education is essentially about the promotion of knowledge and thinking, both of self and of others; reflecting on what this means for us all is essential to the civic process. The second aspect of civic-mindedness is a moderation in the public expression of one's identity and belonging, allowing the development of mutual respect and sharing. Here is another important concept for both society and education, for it does not forbid the expression of identity, affiliation and religious belief, but it does mean that the extent of such expression should not remove the equal right of another to such expression, or to be offended or diminished by such expression. This concept is at the heart of many debates in the UK at present about wearing the veil.

A final theoretical consideration concerns the relation of religion to a secular society. This is very complex and raises much contested notions of secularity, plurality, national history and identity. We could spend all day talking about this one notion, and we may want to refer to it later in our discussions; but suffice to say for now that in our Reference Book we state "... whatever form the rule of law takes ... political neutrality must find ways of integrating diversity, respect for cultural traditions and dialogue between people with due regard for fundamental rights." This is intended to allow for variations in the balance and relationship between the secular and the sacred/religious/spiritual in different places, but without losing sight of the fundamental right to religious freedom and expression.

Slide 11 There are other theoretical issues in the Reference Book. They are mainly to do with explaining the various terms and concepts used, such as plurality and pluralism, culture, race and nationality, and multiculturalism (a renewed topic of debate in the UK) and stereotyping. In listing them in this rather simplistic way, I do not want to belittle their importance or significance, but time does not permit a fuller treatment of these. They are important however, as the use of these terms can vary, and without clarifying what they mean in our Book we risk confusion and misunderstanding. You may wish to raise some of these in discussion later.

The second section bridges the gap between theory and practice, by outlining pedagogically necessary pre-conditions and desirable approaches to handling religious diversity in intercultural education. Such conditions and approaches are the result of much research and experience across a range of educational expertise represented on the group. I will be briefer in describing these.

Slide 12 First, we set out the co-operative approach. This as I am sure you know is based on the premise that no-one can accomplish a task alone, and that it requires everyone to learn together to achieve a common goal. It also requires a positive inter-dependence, both of a structural and of an attitudinal kind in the learning process. Such learning works best in small, heterogeneous groups, in which the individual skills and identity of pupils contributes to their integration.

A second very important consideration is that of the 'safe space' in which pupil self-expression and dialogue can take place. This is linked with pedagogical techniques of simulation and distancing that help create such a space; and with the concept of a religious education (in Britain) that consists of 'learning about religion' and 'learning from religion'.

Yet another consideration is that of empathetic communication – a form of learning that develops the capacity and use of empathy not just to gain better knowledge of ourselves, but also of others, and most importantly, improves our relationships with others.

All of these considerations are basic to approaching how we deal with religious diversity in an effective way. They are like the foundations of a house – without them the building will not stand; yet they are buried in the invisible part of the structure, which we must, from time to time, ensure are in place and sound.

Slide 13 These important considerations are followed by some pedagogical approaches – the phenomenological, the interpretative, the dialogical and the contextual.

- The phenomenological approach, for example, is based on teaching to promote knowledge and understanding rather than pass on a particular religious view; it avoids imposing one's own view. It is 'religious studies' rather than 'theology'. It is impartial rather than biased, professional rather than confessional. All these terms can be flexibly used, however.

- The interpretative approach rests on key concepts of how religion and belief is represented and by whom, how such representation is inevitably

interpreted and mediated, and how important it is for young people to be reflective in their understanding of religion and belief. This is very relevant to understanding the nature and roles of religion in Europe today, for religion is not static but dynamic, not fixed but changing; religions interact and are interpreted and lived differently by different followers. How religion is interpreted and understood is an important part of the educative process.

- The dialogical approach uses work in linguistics to set out the functions of dialogue which can be applied to dialogue on intercultural matters, including inter-religious issues, to allow sharing "the same umbrella" as a way of finding shelter.

- Finally, the contextual approach links any topic of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue with the real life experience and context of the pupils and their societies.

All these approaches are illustrated by practitioners who have used these with young people in promoting intercultural dialogue. The advantages and disadvantages of all these approaches are also set out for practitioners to consider when making their choice of pedagogy.

I am mindful that such a bare description does not do justice to the complexity and significance of these approaches for handling issues of intercultural dialogue, and hope that if you come across a copy of the Reference Book in due course you will be able to make up for my lack of time in taking you through these in any further detail.

Slide 14 I should like to move on to mention the third and fourth sections of the Reference Book. The third section, though briefer, deals with important questions of whole school ethos, and governance and management, including the curriculum, stressing that a consistent and holistic approach is required if religious diversity in intercultural education is to be effectively handled.

Intercultural dialogue will not successfully develop if it is confined to only one part of a pupil's educational experience. There are implications here, too, of course, for the society of which any school is an important part. Again, stating this so quickly does not do justice to the importance of this section. No school stands in isolation from its community of parents and pupils, so what is imparted by the school in its 'hidden' curriculum and in its values are of relevance to the whole community in shaping the skills and attitudes of citizens towards others.

Slide 15 The fourth section consists of a collection of current practices regarding the religious dimension of intercultural education from various schools across Europe. Whilst this section is, inevitably, very varied, it plays an important role in the Reference Book.

First it must be understood that these practices are not included as examples of good practices. They are too varied for that, and some are clearly not as good as others. They were not developed in order to exemplify the text of the Reference Book, but come from a range of good and less good practice to be found in schools across Europe.

The second point is also important; the examples are included to enable

teachers and other practitioners, and those who support them, to do two things – first, to reflect on their own practice by looking at the practice of others, and making inevitable comparisons; and second (more importantly) to develop their own practice further in the light of the experience and methods of others.

Slide 16 Questions are included to enable practitioners to do this. These include

- Could I use this example in my own school? If not, why not?
- How could I modify this example to suit my own situation?
- How could I get the resources to make this example work for me?

Slide 17 Among the possibilities here is that the examples of current practice include the potential use of the arts, literature, religious texts, language teaching, technology and other strategies to promote mutual understanding and dialogue of the religious dimension of intercultural education. They illustrate the range of ways that schools and teachers may use in their different national situations and school curricular structures.

Slide 18 Here is one example – visiting a place of religious significance or worship. The one contained in the Reference Book is from Greece, but these places are found everywhere in Europe. The methodology of this example needs to be contextualised in each place where it might be used. For example, here is the story of a group of children from a very ethnically diverse area of London (Tottenham) who visited a mosque.

Slide 19 The issues that arise from this example are many. They include issues for the school and curriculum. Among these are, first, where to host and locate this kind of ICE learning experience and dialogue, and how to ensure that in practice it is the entitlement of all pupils; second, the nature of the ethos that allows this kind of experience to be provided and valued; third, the implications for the parents as well as the children of the learning opportunities of such a visit; and finally for the community as a whole in its intercultural understanding of the other.

Slide 20 It is impossible for me to go through every example included in the Reference Book and illustrate out its potential. The whole point is that by making the examples available on a wide scale, teachers can do this for themselves and take their practice forward. But not just teachers – teacher trainers, and those responsible for policy and governance in our schools. Therefore, the time has come for this document to be published and used. The important thing to remember is that this publication is not the last word on religious diversity and intercultural education, even by the Council, but, we hope, the beginning of a Council-inspired European-wide process of raising awareness, expertise and confidence in dealing with religious diversity. New plants will grow from the seeds, and, from the foundations laid, new competences will be built.

JOHN KEAST: WORKSHOP ONE - SESSION ONE

Issues of concern

- Realising the extent of commonality between religions, eg between Christians and Muslims which is a high level; they come from the same source
- Realising the diversity within traditions and across religions – this is a great strength, like biological diversity is necessary for the survival of species, so cultural diversity is a good thing for human kind; but people need to be able to represent themselves rather than be stereotyped
- The challenges of secularisation that make it hard to see the importance of religion in culture and also to get beyond the surface of religion into deeper study.
- The difficulty of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in situations of oppression, violence and injustice. This does not motivate the young to take the other with respect
- The connection that many people make between religion and conflict; that it is the cause of wars – this can lead to a plague on all religions and cause more secularisation
- The importance of knowledge – without it there is no objectivity, only prejudice; this leads to suspicion, fear and discrimination; knowledge is important because it can promote better attitudes
- The importance of a personal opportunity to be involved or to make a response by young people, eg not passing on false SMS messages about trouble making
- The important role of language – eg using the correct words for God in the native language to help prevent misunderstandings and separation
- The importance of tolerance, and whether the level of tolerance is related to the level of freedom. Who is the most tolerant? Who is the most free? Does it depend on the level of authority and respect for human rights?

Helpful Learning materials would be:

- To have all the holy books and text in the same edition and format, so that they were accessible for all, and gave the message about their common function and importance
Access to read the Qur'an, Torah etc in the light of their use and context, not out of them
On what the religions have in common
- On key concepts such as tolerance, with practical activities to promote them
On how students can share each others' occasions, such as festivals, symbols etc, and what they mean and have in common
- How to bring groups together in service to others and to the community so that they learn more of each other and discuss their commonality as they work for others

- On how to respect each other in visiting each others' places of worship etc
- The use of pictures to stimulate discussion
- How to promote reciprocity

Some examples that were offered:

- One Giant Leap – using music and other images on DVD (with caution)
- Family Values Guide with practical activities

JOHN KEAST WORK GROUP ONE: SESSION TWO

Discussion took place regarding the inputs yesterday about intercultural dialogue in education and school. The UK system was clarified, concerning RE and worship. Each delegate then clarified the situation in their own countries regarding the teaching of religion in schools, where the teachers came from, who trained them, who constructed the curriculum, whether children were taught in separate religion classes or all together, whether RE was compulsory and what provision was made for those who did not study religion, etc

Issues that arose were:

- Is it good that students are taught religion in separate schools or separate classes for each religion? If so, will they ever meet each other's religion enough?
- What is the curriculum for the students if they are taught separately? Should it be just their own religions? Is it better for students to be taught together about all the religions? If so, who should teach it and how?
- Who supplies the teachers? Do they have to be members of a particular religion in order to teach it?
- Who trains the teachers? Are they supplied, trained and certificated by the religions or by the state, or by a combination?
- Who employs the teachers, and on what terms? Are they similar to those for teachers of other subjects?
- How do we deal with the inevitable differences (say the 15% of beliefs not shared in common between Islam and Christianity)? Since we cannot eliminate them, we must learn to live with difference and value it. How?

There was then discussion of whether it would be better to have a 'non-religion' approach and just focus on common human values and ethical issues.

There was also discussion on how we teach the failure of religion(s) to students; that is, why there is still poverty, division and disagreement in the world, which all the religions are supposed to be against. This is linked with the students' resistance to religion as a successful way of looking at life, particularly when confronted by the obviously successful model that science offers for understanding life.

One recommendation was made: that all pupils should be taught all the religions in all countries of Europe and the Mediterranean (and the rest of the world).

Suggestions for learning materials included

discussion material on ethical and life issues (eg abortion) that interested students and could then lead on to understanding religious view points; developing material on the use of stories and novels to deal with religious diversity; this is a powerful medium for students; and could be expanded to materials on music as well

THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND MEN IN INTERCULTURAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

“RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM”

Professor Loubnaa Youssef, Cairo University

Introduction

Angel in heaven tells a deceased Muslim not to tell the other Muslims that he has seen people of other faith there – could be used for any faith

What is not easy is to allow other religions to enrich ourselves; difficult to get pupils to be or remain committed to own faith whilst learning about and celebrating that of others; no religions condemn each other – many things in common, all think they have the truth, but some have tendency to want to convert others (do not do it with languages!)

Islam embraces diversity – “let there be no compulsion”

Same terms used of Qur’an as of Torah and Bible – guidance and light; reinforces the commonality of the Abrahamic religions, but have to accept that there are different beliefs (like there are languages which lead to translations) so have to be inter-religious dialogue too.

Dilemma for teachers as to where to start and where to go – what to teach and how

What we teach: content/concepts: matter of faith, etc

Role/method of the teacher

Have to ‘unlearn’ students at university – not taught to think for themselves

Critical thinking

The Rhetorical situation

Daily episodic

Critical thinking

is more than knowledge, but a way of thinking through informed question, developing intellect and take ideas consciously, and to reflect and analyse

Knowledge, facts, exploration
Cultural context
Concepts that lead to thinking (democracy)
Observation to inference
Analysis to weigh and consider
Apply critical thinking
Only connect
Weaves old and new ideas

Understanding the Rhetorical situation – writer, purpose, audience, topic, context
Write and speak (with credentials and credibility, position and belief)
Audience and reader (eg hostile, media)
Purpose (topic, focus, context, to inform, analyse, persuade, action etc)
Various factors and contexts necessary
Two components – skill to think and process ideas, and acquire the habit of thinking

Role of questions in thinking, teaching and learning
Three categories – factual (eg capital of Egypt), open (as many answers as questioners!), better or worse answers (evidence weighing etc)
Important for driving the topic, and motivating students

An example would be an assignment to analyse the controversy (articles on) the wearing of the headscarf in Europe; using group work, points to consider with prompt questions eg what are the different standpoints. Criteria for assessment would include clarity, persuasion etc

Another example is the teaching of 'Ethics' as a new subject (result of having US aid to Egypt to build the education system); controversial because of fear that it will lead to demise of religion; leads to closer analysis of effectiveness of teaching religion in school. [Speakers own religion class did no harm but had argument with husband over the learning of Christmas carols]; students to consider whether, how, why religion should be taught in schools, etc.

*No one can acquire for another, not one
No one can grow for another, not one
The song is to the singer, and comes back most to him
The teaching is to the teacher, and comes back most to him
Walt Whitman*

THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND MEN IN INTERCULTURAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Fatma Amer

Own experience of being a British Muslim woman who does not now feel she belongs to Alexandria where she was born – but she knows where she belongs in her role as wife and mother of 5 children

Outline: the British scene (but not excluding Europe), difference between dialogue and debate (need to be open and honest)

British demography

Very mixed religiously and socially, live together in daily interaction, richly enhanced by mutual will and desire to live in peace and harmony etc
Example of Muslim populations demography eg Tower Hamlets 36%, and nationally 1.8 million (3%) – half in London (1 million out of 7.2 million); true for other faiths too, eg largest Sikh population outside India; Muslim community also the youngest community, 33.8% under 16 (national average is 20%); 50% born in UK

Ugly side – hostile interactions, usually based on ignorance – can lead to suspicion, hatred etc; seen in employment, housing, law and order
Positive side – new policies on sentencing for religious aggravated offences by CPS, anti-discrimination legislation, faith communities unit,

Living in a pluralist society – importance of understanding the other and going on to respect; if I do not respect you, I give you the tool (means) to not respect me. It is important to have integrity and good understanding. There is a difference between ability to live in a pluralistic setting and losing one's identity. Issue of multiple identities – does not create schizophrenic young people but people can be citizens of the world and of a place

One major step is to learn to understand about the other, religions etc from their perspective

This should be based on the conviction that people exist to differ and that the right differ must be respected as well as expected

However it is extremely important to always acknowledge the simple fact that despite such differences there are always communalities which bind the whole human family together.

How to build bridges – good role model in UK: Religions for Peace, UK (Justice, peace and harmony)

Impact of the faith organisations

WCC, CoE, other churches seek to build good relations with others in service to society (under the umbrella of the establishment)

CoE in 1981 agreed the four principles of IFD

Begins when people meet

depends on mutual understanding and trust

Medium of authentic witness

Work of interfaith advisers in dioceses etc

Involvement of the church in social affairs etc

Resources produced and events held

Influence of the Archbishop of Canterbury

Support of the monarchy and Prince Charles – 'defender of faiths'

Impact of inter-faith organisations
Increasing government interest in this area
Many organisations, including Christian Muslim Forum, Inter Faith Network

Impact of particular events

Millennium celebration

Women - are they the missing dimension?

Role of the woman important - comes from the faith: after the Prophet's first revelation - went to a Christian. In UK today there are still mosques where women cannot go; and where non-Muslims cannot enter!

Rise in inter faith activity organised by/for women; fourth generation of women of other faiths in UK

Contribute to international and to local inter faith groups, eg Leicester

Religion is about saying prayers, faith is about living prayers

Some of the qualities women have are

Sociability, hospitality, can improvise, non-confrontational, listen well, informal, sensitive, cooperative

Seen in free standing initiatives, or part of national initiatives, young women's initiatives, through shared meals, dialogue, celebrations, fundraising, visits, workshops, courses

Obstacles include

- Feeling marginalised (uncomfortable, unheard etc)
- Under represented
- Lack of time (family duties etc)
- Lack of support from community)
- Cultural and language barriers
- Lack of leadership skills

JOHN KEAST WORK GROUP ONE: SESSION THREE

1. The role of men and women in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

There was discussion about the changes in the role of women in the last 100 and particularly the last 30 years in the way women were able to exercise leadership in some Christian churches in Europe. Differences between north and south Europe were noted.

There was discussion about the interaction between the role of women in society generally and the role of women in religion, and whether changes in one field affected changes in the other. Notions of equality, equal opportunity

and rights and sameness were discussed. Is it the case that being equal means being the same?

This led to discussion of the differences between men and women generally, both in brain structure and chemistry and in roles played historically and today. This might be due to evolutionary needs of men as protectors and breadwinners and women as child bearers and rearers. It was accepted that roles vary in different parts of the world, and that roles change, eg in Europe where most teachers are now women.

Regarding intercultural dialogue, it was suggested that women can play a vital role in practical dialogue, ie meeting each other in local groups with common concerns such as the welfare and upbringing of children. This can happen even if men are in positions of leadership and theological differences remain unresolved. Women should not be confined to such a role, however, as they should have the same opportunities for dialogue and leadership as men at all levels.

2. The nature of faith

An interesting story of experiments with rats showed the importance of faith and hope (religion of a kind) for rats in danger of drowning, and therefore by implication for all human beings. This led to discussion on whether religion is more to do with institutions or to do with individuals. There is scope for developing intercultural dialogue on the personal level if not on the institutional level.

3. Suggestions for learning materials included

- Materials that reflect the questions that children ask
- Materials that go beyond the superficial level of knowledge that encyclopaedias provide, with real life examples of dialogue in different countries
- Materials on general human issues, such as What do we mean by the good life? With strategies for engaging students in these questions (eg the diamond 9)
- Materials and ideas for service projects (some were suggested by members of the group)

The point was made that in working up materials of these kinds it would be necessary to define the approaches being used. Such approaches may include the

Historical approach (eg how and why religions are like they are)

Values approach (what religions share in common etc)

Contemporary issues approach (what is of importance to students' lives today)

RECOMMENDATIONS (JOHN KEAST, WORKING GROUP ONE)

The Anna Lindh Foundation should:

- stress the importance of representing the individual diversity of religions, religious perceptions, and how religions are lived;
- promote a curriculum/subject that looks at all religions for all students together;
- emphasise that teaching of religions should not be confessional but should promote real knowledge and understanding;
- advocate the provision of additional classes in ethics/values/relationships and brain development for all students;
- insist that teachers of religion should be qualified and trained in religious sciences and pedagogy;
- insist teachers should take into account the different levels of understanding and experiences of students in the class, and use pedagogical skills;
- hold seminars for teachers of all subjects to come together and promote intercultural dialogue with each other (including exchange programmes) but ensure prior preparation, bringing of materials and visits to places of intercultural importance;
- produce a guide (or curriculum model with recommendations about learning materials – not a manual) for teachers to help students deal with ‘me and the other’, to develop understanding of the other, improve relationships, social skills and cooperation, including practical exercises as well as theory, skills, techniques and methods of questioning;
- encourage teachers to develop their own skills and professionalism, with access to continued training;
- help teachers to be confident enough to resist political, social and religious pressure;
- promote the use of e-communications and exchange programmes among students.

LEARNING MATERIALS (WORKING GROUP ONE)

The Anna Lindh Foundation should produce learning materials on:

- Ethical/life issues that students are interested in;

- How to use stories and novels to deal with religious diversity;
- How to use music/arts/drama and movies for this;
- What religions have in common;
- Key concepts such as tolerance and how to promote them;
- How students can share each others' festivals and occasions, and what they mean;
- How to bring groups of students together for service activities;
- How to use ICT to promote intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, including how to recognise misinformation and bias on the internet;
- Websites that are useful sources of such material eg www.reonline.org.uk and www.retoday.org.uk.

Such materials could come from sharing what already exists or producing new ones, so that each school has a tool kit (some being developed already).

John Keast, 1 December 2006