

Religion and education - Agenda

- 9:30am **Welcome and introductions**
Setting ground rules.
- 9:45am **Ice-breaker: 'Food for thought'**
This ice-breaker asks students to reflect on a selection of quotes concerning education.
- 10:05am **Outside speakers: Britain, faith and education**
An opportunity to invite outside speakers to talk about the role of religion in the British education system. Suggestions for speakers and topic areas are provided.
- 10:35am **Group discussion: Religious education in schools - the good and the bad?**
Young people break into small groups to discuss religious education in schools. Some possible areas to help prompt discussion are suggested.
- 11:10am **Break**
- 11:30am **Question & Answer session with visiting speakers**
- 12:00 noon **Lunch**
- 1:00pm **Activity: 'Chatter bugs'**
Students explore and debate controversial comments about faith schools and faith in British schools.
- 1:25pm **Group discussion: Faith Schools - gateways to greater religious understanding?**
Students are asked for their initial thoughts through an agreement line exercise. They then split into small groups to debate the positive and negative aspects of faith schools.
- 2:10pm **Break**
- 2:20pm **Activity: Education - the impact of religion, gender and nationality**
Many factors can affect educational chances. In this last session we widen the discussion to look at gender, religion and nationality and how these factors impact on educational chances.
- 3:20pm **Reflection: The future of Faith and Education**
Reflections on the day and identifying aspirations for the future
- 3:30pm **Finish**

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*"The world stands upon three things: upon the Law,
upon worship and upon showing kindness."*
Judaism Mishnah, Abot 1.2

"What sculpture is to a block of marble, education is to a human soul."
Joseph Addison

*"Apply yourself. Get all the education you can, but then...do something. Don't just stand
there, make it happen."*
Lee Iacocca

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."
William Butler Yeats

2. Outside speakers: Britain, faith and education (30 minutes)

This is a good opportunity to invite one or more outside speakers into the school. The speaker(s) should outline the importance of religious education in schools. They could outline the opportunities that students have to explore faith throughout the time in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 and give reasons for why students learn about different subjects.

This speaker could be the local representative from the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education or perhaps someone working in teacher training at a local college. If the school has good links with the local community, why not ask local faith leaders to give presentations? This could provide insights into the role faith plays in education from a variety of religious perspectives. If the school is secular, you could invite in a teacher from a faith-based school, or vice versa.

3. Group discussion: Religious Education in schools - good or bad? (35 minutes)

- Ask the young people to consider these questions for a couple of minutes. This will help them to think through some of the good and bad aspects of religious education in schools.
 - Why study religion in school?
 - Do students have enough opportunity to talk about morals and values in school? Is RE about learning facts?
 - Do all faiths get equal coverage in the curriculum?
 - Does the curriculum in Britain need to be changed to make it more relevant to all religions? If so, how? If not, why not?
 - Do you think RE is given enough status in schools?
 - In some countries, like France and USA, no religion is allowed in schools. In France students can't wear crucifixes or hijabs. Where do you see the influence of religion in your school?
 - What role should religion play in schools?
- Divide the participants into small groups. One member of each group should draw a table with two columns - one entitled 'Good things about RE and faith in schools', the second entitled 'Bad things about RE and faith in schools'.
- The group should start thinking about things they particularly like or dislike, noting anything that they find uncomfortable or controversial.
- The groups should display their completed tables and read each other's comments.
- They should prepare questions and comments to ask the outside speakers during the following question and answer session.

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5. Group discussion: Faith schools - gateways to greater religious understanding? (45 minutes)

This exercise asks students to develop and consider the arguments for and against faith schools.

- Begin with an agreement line. Students stand at one end of the room if they agree with the statement and the other end if they disagree. Here are some suggested statements:
 - The government should not fund any more faith schools.
 - Parents should have the right to send their children to a faith school if they want to.
- Ask students at the edges of the room to explain the reasons for their position, for around 10 minutes.
- Then break the students into groups of around six to discuss recent newspaper articles, giving more detailed opinions on the issue.
- Half of the group should examine the articles in favour of faith schools, and half should consider the articles against. They should jot down key thoughts as they go along.
- After 25 minutes, the groups of six should reconvene.
- Each small group should summarise the points made by the journalists in each of the articles to their peers.
- They should spend the last 10 minutes trying to reach a consensus.
- As an extension activity, you could ask the young people to write their own article, setting out their opinions about the role that religion should play in the British education system.

Links to articles:

FOR

Keep God out of Class, Polly Toynbee, *The Guardian*

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,5500,590352,00.html>

Curb influence of religions in schools, says NUT Rebecca Smithers, *The Guardian*

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/faithschools/story/0,,1749066,00.html>

AGAINST

Face to Faith, Simon Roker, *The Guardian*

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/comment/story/0,,1769081,00.html>

Faith in their Community, Louise Tickle, *The Guardian*

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/faithschools/story/0,,1670823,00.html>

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- Ask the participants to identify which of these goals deal with education. In fact, the MDGs also included a target to achieve equal access for girls to education by 2005. This target was missed in more than 70 countries. Please see Save the Children's campaign on Girls' Education for more information.
http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk_cache/scuk/cache/cmsattach/2479_GECbriefing.pdf
- Ask the participants to look back at the suggestions for improving educational chances that they wrote down in the last activity. Then compare their suggestions with the report cards below. These outline what some of the richest countries in the world are doing to improve educational opportunities. How do their tactics differ from what the young people suggested?
- Give students a report card from a selection of six.² (See below). Ask them to read through and give their country an overall grade, based on the report given.
- Each group should give brief feedback on their country's progress and how and why they arrived at their grade.
- As extension activity, you could ask the participants to think about who else helps to ensure that all children get access to an education. Ask the participants to research the work of faith-based and secular charities working in this area. For a list of charities please see, 'The Good in Religion' activity in the 'Working in the classroom or an established youth group' section of the resources.

Report cards

Report card : USA		
Name: George Bush		
Overall grade:	Position in class:	20th of 21
Subject		Grade (A-F)
Meeting the internationally-recognised aid target		E
Providing a fair share of the funding needed for universal primary education		F
Committing to co-ordinate for better results		E
Focusing on poorest countries where girls most lack access to education		C
Providing high-quality aid to education		F
Teacher's remarks George is making strides to increase basic education funding, although he is not yet living up to his potential. He is also focusing more on girls' education, and does better at focusing on poorer countries than in other subjects. To make a real difference, though, he should increase his assistance to primary education, and disclose how much aid is untied.		

² *Missing the Mark - a School Report on rich countries contribution to Universal Primary Education by 2015* The Global Campaign for Education: April 2005

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Report card : Greece	
Name: Konstandinos Simitis	
Overall grade:	Position in class: 14th of 21
Subject	Grade (A-F)
Meeting the internationally-recognised aid target	E
Providing a fair share of the funding needed for universal primary education	B
Committing to co-ordinate for better results	F
Focusing on poorest countries where girls most lack access to education	F
Providing high-quality aid to education	B
Teacher's remarks Konstandinos has done much better this term. He has really tried to meet his responsibilities to basic education, and provide aid of better quality. There is room for improvement, though, in being more generous with the aid budget and to the poorest countries, which would bring him into top half of the class.	

Report card : Ireland	
Name: Bertie Ahern	
Overall grade:	Position in class: 6th of 21
Subject	Grade (A-F)
Meeting the internationally-recognised aid target	D
Providing a fair share of the funding needed for universal primary education	D
Committing to co-ordinate for better results	C
Focusing on poorest countries where girls most lack access to education	A
Providing high-quality aid to education	A
Teacher's remarks Bertie has missed his chance for top marks by breaking his promise to meet the internationally-recognised aid target in 2007. This is especially disappointing given his excellent record on providing high-quality aid and his real concern for the poorest countries.	

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Report card : Norway	
Name:	Kjell Magne Bondevik
Overall grade:	Position in class: 1st of 21
Subject	Grade (A-F)
Meeting the internationally-recognised aid target	A
Providing a fair share of the funding needed for universal primary education	A
Committing to co-ordinate for better results	A
Focusing on poorest countries where girls most lack access to education	A
Providing high-quality aid to education	A
Teacher's remarks Top of the class! Kjell has surpassed himself to become a class leader, improving in every subject. He has made a particular effort to improve in his share of basic education funding and his commitment to the Fast Track Initiative. He is an inspiration to his classmates.	

7. Reflection: The future of education (10 minutes)

Ask each participant to write down one statement. This should set out their aspirations for the future of education. Here are two examples:

- In the future all students should have equal educational opportunities.
- In the future everyone should be taught about lots of different religious beliefs.

This will help the students to reflect on the day and could provide a springboard for an extension activity in the classroom at a later date.

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