

Islington Community of Schools: Youth SACRE

Promoting children and young peoples' voices on the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

February 11th session report



School delegates to Youth SACRE at our February session. We were also joined by Tristram Jenkins (back row middle), representing NASACRE and Westhill, our funders.

On Monday 11th February, 23 delegates from Years 5-9 in eight Islington schools met at Laycock Centre to continue the conversation they began at our session on December 4th about issues important to relations between people of different faiths and beliefs. Later they will report on their activities to Islington's faith leaders who sit on the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education. Many will also attend our Islington schools' RE youth conference at the Emirates in April.

Those who arrived early did a quiz on the numbers of people by their religion living in Islington. Before lunch we re-introduced ourselves and said if we had a particular religion or no religion. We looked again at the roles we said we took last time (such as 'listener', 'thinker', 'planner' or even 'dreamer') and we were encouraged to think about the roles we could try and take this time to ensure we were participating to the full. We were especially encouraged to be 'decision-makers' today because we had to decide what the important issues were and what we were going to do about them.

What we did after the last session

We heard about how some delegates had taken action to follow through the issues that came up at our last session.

- Our two delegates from St John the Evangelist reported back to their school assembly.

- The students from Mount Carmel, an RC school, had been concerned as to whether their peers from other religions felt included in school lessons and activities. They decided to ask them about this, and designed a questionnaire. They told the headteacher, heads of year and head of RE what they were going to do; they all recognised how useful the questionnaire could be. At first they tried to conduct the survey during registration time, but they found it was easier to get the attention of their peers in RE lessons.

'We found that most of us share the same values, such as honesty, morality, love, kindness....'

'Some girls of other faiths wanted a prayer room at the school'

'After talking to the students we feel we need to make sure everyone feels included in Masses and services and that their religious festivals are better recognised.'

'We are getting together to think about the next steps'

- Mount Carmel students reporting back.

Concentric circles:

We divided into two circles, one inside the other, facing each other. We then had a minute each to talk to the person facing us, responding to a question. When the teacher shouted 'Outer circle, step to the right!' all of those on the outer circle moved, so that they were now facing a new partner. The teacher then asked a new question. And so it continued! The questions were all about living alongside other faiths, if we enjoy RE, what we would most like to change.....



'Are you religious? How do you think this affects your life?'

To work up an appetite the young people presented some drama 'freeze-frames'. They then played a game that got them into the groups they would work in after lunch.



'I feel cold'



'I feel left out'



'I am a champion!'

Religions and beliefs

Two of the adults kindly modelled a discussion about what their religion and beliefs are and how it may affect their lives.





We sat at the tables in our groups of four and talked about our religion or not having a religion, our beliefs and our values. After that we broke into pairs and wrote down what the other had said.

What groups reported about their discussions:

Our values and beliefs:

- *Observing the rituals of prayer*
- *Praying about important things*
- *Although we follow different religions in our family we all respect each other's beliefs*
- *We follow our religions but don't let it take over*
- *Our family is devout – we believe in sticking to the rituals and celebrations*
- *Our families feel our different traditions are important*

About me:

- *My religious values help me deal with everything from day-to-day*
- *It can be difficult to always consistently follow my religious values*

Talking about religion:

- *We talk about it in RE, not so much elsewhere*
- *We don't talk with friends about it much, especially as it may cause tension*
- *Many of our friends are respectful towards each other's religions and beliefs*
- *Some of us feel it shouldn't be talked about, but others feel it's important to talk about as it is important to who we are*
- *We can speak openly about religion. It's important to and interesting, especially so we can dispel any myths.....*

Agreement line!

It was time to revisit some of the issues that came up last time.



Sometimes you have to stick to your opinion even if no-one else agrees with you!



Sometimes lots of people see both sides of the argument!

Here's some of the questions we considered....and whether we agreed or disagreed:

- 'Most of my friends share my religion or beliefs'
Most of us stood in the middle – between 'agree' and 'disagree'
- 'I feel confident in talking about my beliefs and values'
Most of us agreed or stood in the middle – between 'agree' and 'disagree'
- 'If you are religious then you have a stronger sense of who you are'
Most of us agreed or stood in the middle – between 'agree' and 'disagree'
- 'Parents don't let children choose a religion or belief for themselves'
Most of us disagreed, but five of us agreed
- 'It's difficult to be religious as a young person in Britain today'
Most of us agreed
- 'Faith schools should do more to include other religions and beliefs'
Most of us agreed
- 'Youth culture makes it difficult to be religious'
We were evenly divided.

Looking at scenarios for a multi-faith society:

We began to think more deeply about some ‘difficult issues’. Some of these we had raised at our last session.



We looked at several different cards, each giving a ‘difficult scenario’

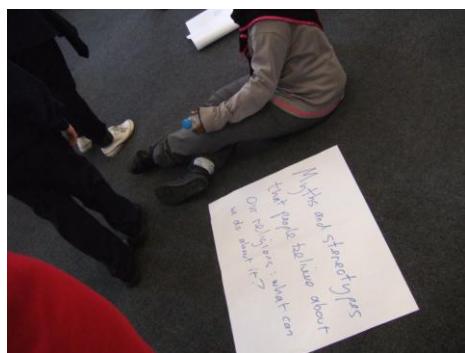
When discussing each card we decided what was happening, where potential disagreements were, who was in the right and who was in the wrong, what role religion played in the situation, and what we thought would happen next.

Some key points from the groups’ feedback:

- *The fears of a family about a child marrying outside the religion can be understood, especially where they may feel shame or embarrassment, be worried about what religion their children will follow, however*
- *Each individual’s choices need to be listened to and respected as well*
- *If people feel they were forced to do something against their religion (eg. A school mistakenly serving wrongly-labeled food) then the individual can be cleansed through talking to their faith leaders, and they can complain to the school*
- *When advocating something, or arguing passionately against other people’s behavior on religious or belief grounds, we must also respect other people’s choices*
- *A lot of these scenarios are not straightforward and we always need to listen before deciding!*

Taking action

We talked about what key issues we felt were most important for us to focus on when deciding what to do next. These topics were written on posters and spread across the floor. We had to identify the one we were most interested in and stand by it. Once we knew who we would work with we began to think about what we could do to further explore or act on the issue when we meet next term. We also wrote down the topic in case we were able to take it back to our classes so they could also have an input.



The ones we chose to focus on were:

- How to make RE lessons more interesting/relevant
- Myths and stereotypes about our religions and cultures: what can we do to tackle them?
- Do people from different religions in Islington mix?
- Is one religion more British than another? Why?
- What can we find out and do about tensions between religions at community and international level?

And finally.....we came together and listened to three of us read 'Who are the British?', Benjamin Zephaniah's introduction to his poetry book 'We are Britain'. This powerfully and movingly affirms our unity and commonalities in celebrating our diversity.

We had a lot of fun and the children and young people again made really considered, insightful and thought-provoking comments. Importantly they also fulfilled the aims of the day by making informed decisions that promise much for our session next term. There we will be preparing presentations for the young people to take to the SACRE AGM.



Goodbye and see you next term!

SO A BIG THANK YOU TO ALL WHO CAME, including the adults who accompanied all the young people; and a special thank you to Ashleigh and Sinead (Pooles Park Primary) who helped facilitate the session.

Tim Spafford
14th February 2013

Participating schools were:

Grafton Primary, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Secondary School for Girls, Hungerford Primary, Mount Carmel RC Secondary School for Girls, Pooles Park Primary, St Aloysius RC Secondary School for Boys, St Andrews Barnsbury C of E Primary, St John the Evangelist RC Primary.