

Standing Advisory Council For Religious Education (SACRE)

Fourth Public Annual Lecture

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for Religious Education**

**"Putting Faith in Citizenship: Is there room for RE as well
as Citizenship in the Curriculum?"**

Transcript of the lecture

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Putting Faith in Citizenship: Is there room for RE as well as Citizenship in the Curriculum?

By Lat Blaylock

Introduction by Gillian Wood, Chair, Kingston SACRE

Each year we try to find a topic and, therefore, a speaker to link the activities of the Standing Advisory Council to Religious Education with the community and with the schools. Last year we met at Bucklands Infant School, Chessington where our speaker was Indarji Singh giving us his perspective on Religious Education. Citizenship became a compulsory part of the secondary curriculum in September, and so the obvious choice was to ask Lat Blaylock to come along and talk to us about the link between Religious Education and Citizenship. Lat is the Executive Officer of the Professional Council for Religious Education. Lat taught RE, Humanities and Personal and Social Education in Leicestershire before he took up his present post and it gives him a wide remit and responsibility to promote RE nationally. He is well-respected in the RE and in the education world, generally, and we are delighted that he could come and share his thoughts with us tonight. At the end of his talk, he has said that he is willing to take some questions.

Lat Blaylock

To begin I'd like to congratulate Kingston SACRE on its ability to run annual lectures. Not all SACREs are so active and not all SACREs so able to draw a crowd, so thank you all for coming tonight – a pleasure to be here with you and I do think that actually the power of the SACRE is yet to be felt in many ways. There are many things that SACREs can do. I just draw your attention to the fact that, I think, SACREs are unabolishable. Who could possibly think that abolishing SACREs that represent local councillors, school teachers themselves and members of representatives of all the religions of the UK. So SACREs are here to stay and their full power is not yet realised.

The topic I have this evening is about the frontier between Citizenship and Religious Education and I have put some notes around. Annex 1 to lecture notes. They are not any sort of comprehensive picture of what I have to say, but they illustrate some of the areas that I want to just delve into a little bit. We will explore, what I think, is a really important topic : the frontier between Religious Education and Citizenship in schools in England today. In approaching that topic what I wanted to do is to give you a few thoughts of my own, which are very definitely my own. They do not claim to represent any broad perspective, they are not necessarily even research based. They are a perspective, my own, and I hope you will find they are not something to agree with, but just at least something to chew on, even if what you want to do with them at the end of the evening is to spit them out, then that would be fine.

I also want to present you with a few examples, some classroom examples of pupils' work and things that children do in Religious Education. We do not have many yet

that come from Citizenship as a field, but examples of what pupils do, again just to chew upon, and to think carefully about how Citizenship and Religious Education will and must relate to each other.

“Independence Day”

I bet you have not seen. No, actually, some of you might have done, the movie “Independence Day”. “Independence Day” is an absolutely splendid movie in which invaders from Mars get defeated by a united global military community, and the plotline of the film just invents this imaginary martian “other” that comes invading and puts great big spaceships all over our key cities and threatens us. Such a common device in narrative is to create an “other” in order to unite us against them. And it shows, just to illustrate what I want to start with, a simple point in many ways that we often define ourselves as citizens, or with some other corporate definition over and against some of them.

I want to say this evening which is the principal point that I want to share with you, that citizenship programmes in education, whether those are in English education, or education anywhere in the world, citizenship programmes for the 21st century absolutely need to define the “us”, the human “us” as widely as possible. They need to dismantle barriers and walls between people to help people understand why those barriers and walls continue to grow up and to be powerful.

My favourite scene in “Independence Day” is when a martian has been captured and hidden deep underground somewhere in the Nevada Desert and the American President comes across the Nevada Desert to see this alien. The alien grabs hold of a human and manages to speak through the human’s voice and holds him up against a piece of glass. The American President makes a little speech in which he says, I am sure there can be harmony between our two peoples. What do you want us to do? And the alien, speaking through the dead body of this human that he has captured and killed, says, in answer to the question, what do you want us to do, he says, die! Which is not a very promising starting point for dialogue really. But, actually, it is troubling to me as well that “Independence Day” makes itself an immensely popular film by handling as its formula for generating human harmony the American President leading all the nations of the world in a military assault which is both cunning, clever, undermining and subversive of the martian invasion which is more powerful than any bombs that the American President has at his command.

Actually, the recipe that the film gives for global peace is kill all your enemies and unite behind the one world leader. On a day like today, and I wrote all this stuff before it was a day like today, you may look into your own religious convictions, or other convictions whatever those might be, and say, yes, I would like to entreat all powers and gurus, swamis and saints and whatever you do entreat, and the whole human community to make peace. That is based on another route than that and actually citizenship studies in schools say that they are about community cohesion and community harmony and in some ways the citizenship orders that David Blunket, Professor Bernard Crick wrote for us and have given us in statutory form for education in schools from 2002. Those citizenship orders are greatly about the way to peace in communities. That is in part what delights me about the fact that we have got a new subject in school. What used to be a curriculum subject of 10 subjects now

has 11, but it is also something that troubles me to some extent, because on what basis can human communities that are religiously, ethnically, gender and in many other ways diverse communities on what basis can such communities find the capacity to, not unite, but to disagree respectfully, I think, is what I am after.

Curriculum Territory

What I have for you this evening is in some ways a picture of the ways in which religious education that has hammered out its rationale a picture of what it is to be educational in the context of diverse religions. RE has hammered that out over four decades now and come to a point of some self-understanding of its mission and purpose in plural communities. I think, that Religious Education has hammered out something which citizenship has only just begun to bring to education and because of that Religious Education has not just a place alongside citizenship and the other subjects of the national curriculum in school for the 21st century, it has rather than that a key place. Actually, a key gift that, at its best, may be able to give to the new subject of Citizenship Studies.

Now that in some ways is an ambitious target for what we are going to try and do, but let us see if we can make some sense of that. This is my kind of little structure for where my talk is going and the first items are:

What is happening in our curriculum?

What impact can this have on RE?

What response should teachers of RE make?

Should they make barricades against Citizenship, or should they fling wide the gate and welcome the new subject into their citadel, and what then does the frontier between RE and Citizenship look like?

Those four questions lead off what I want to say in the first instance, because, it seems to me that in some ways making a new subject in the curriculum is maybe easy and helpful to understand if we use the metaphor of territory. So if the curriculum itself is a piece of territory, then actually when you put a new subject in that new bit of territory into the curriculum, you make some new frontiers. My picture of how Religious Education and Citizenship relate is that Religious Education has a bit of curricular territory (often quite a small bit of curricula territory sometimes quite a threatened bit). Although Religious Education and Citizenship share some concerns about, for instance, questions of identity, questions of belief, questions of community, there are other parts of the citizenship territory that are really very far from Religious Education.

For instance, the Hansard stuff, the material about the structures of local democracy, the stuff about how to open a bank account. As significant and important as that may be that is not really the part of the Citizenship territory that is on a frontier with Religious Education. So if you picture it like that, and go with my metaphor for a few minutes there, then if you make a new country and you redraw the borders of the countries, then making a new subject is perhaps like that, and Religious Educationists must decide what to do with that new frontier between their subject and Citizenship. Maybe you come at this lecture from the Citizenship side of that frontier

and you will see where I am from. I am from the RE side of that and I am unashamed about where I am from.

Religious Education going global

I am quite happy with that identity that puts me in RE but I am wanting to listen to what the Citizenship side of the frontier has to say to my subject. I, actually, think that RE needs to learn from Citizenship as well as, perhaps, from some lessons going the other way too. Tom Payne, of course, is very difficult to classify religiously. He has some links with where I am from in Leicester and, if you want to place him there, he was born in 1737 and died in 1809. Thomas Payne was successively a citizen of Britain, France and America and had his citizenships revoked as well and reviled, because his citizenship often expressed itself in forms that the nation state that he was supposed to be part of in that particular year did not find at all acceptable. He was a specialist in biting the hand that fed him. I am very interested in his origins that his parents were members of the Society of Friends (Quakers). Maybe that explains some of his willingness to be the radical, to be unbothered by the ways in which the national community that gave him citizenship might find itself under attack from some of his more rabid pronouncements.

I am giving ourselves a bit of space to Tom Payne tonight because I love his dictum. It may help us as we look at what is it to be a citizen, a little part of what we must touch upon this evening, but only very briefly. 200 years ago Tom Payne gave us this dictum, "My country is the world and my religion is to do good", and I love this dictum of Thomas Payne's because it says to me something about the ways in which religious education tries to picture itself as an influence in the curriculum in England. But the RE curriculum wants to connect, not with the national curriculum actually, but more with the international curriculum. RE, at its best, is rather good at going global. RE, at its best is rather good at drawing attention to the question about what it is that is good. What is of benefit to the human community? What do we mean by goodness? And in RE, we need to enable children and young people to be more than just workers or examination fodder.

The outcomes that RE seeks for pupils includes being active and spiritually engaged, as morally thoughtful member, not just to the nation's state or of a local society, but of the whole world community that's RE, at its best, and I know it is often not like this. I know that it is often just absorbed with its own struggles, but at its best, RE can push those frontiers and questions and issues that say in answer to Tom Payne. What is it to be religious in a whole wide world? What is it to be good in a whole human community? Now we need that because 200 years after Tom Payne gave out that nice little dictum, it is the case that today, 19,000 children will die world-wide, because of the preventable diseases of poverty – 19,000. And it is the case today that the 20 richest people in the world own as much, control as much wealth as the 47 poorest nations. Are any of those 20 in tonight? No, good, because I am going to be rude about them. Society is a global community. Global and Community are words that hardly seem to connect or speak to each other at all. Just do not forget that evil statistic, the only statistic that really matters tonight. 19,000 children, each day, every day who die in the world because of the preventable diseases of poverty.

So a Citizenship that is worth its name needs to be more than a national citizenship, needs to be more of a citizenship of the world and that is not a simple thing to understand, not a simple thing to describe or define. I will say a little later on about how we construct the idea of a citizen for the Citizenship education, RE frontier. But the citizenship that RE urges and that RE seeks to have an open frontier with needs at some level at least to be global in scope and human in its definition.

Religious Leaders – good citizens?

I wanted to turn my attention to religion for a moment because it is easy for me in the work that I do, wandering around talking about RE here, there and everywhere, wherever anyone is interested to listen, it is easy for me to end up with rather a silvered, glossed view of religion and that is not actually a true and accurate picture of religion. Religion in the world today is responsible for conflict as often perhaps as much as it is responsible for reconciliation. It is responsible for the breakdown and division of communities in some ways and in other ways responsible for the healing and building of communities and I just want to take a look at Religion and how it begins in the light of the idea of national citizenship that rather stands behind the citizenship orders which are still for implementing in this academic year. You may have noticed with me that many religious leaders do not actually keep very good records on citizenship issues.

Guru Nanak, for example, is imprisoned for his radicalism, is judged to have failed his business studies examinations, because he gives his dud money away when he is supposed to be trading it. And Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, he moves away, emigrates with dignity to live free from hostility and idolatry from Mecca to Medina leaving, as it seems at first the citizens responsibility. Jesus gets imprisoned and then executed by the legitimate government of his day and actually does that on the basis of having offended and disturbed every religious authority and harmony structure in the state of Israel at his time, In fact, if you go through your list of who started a religion, or who energised a religion with a reform movement, then you very often will not find people there with values to commend to the young citizen, like the family values, keeping the rules, getting involved, standing for decency that are at the heart of the citizenship orders that Mr Blunket and Professor Crick have prepared for schools. If you want good role models for young people, you probably would not include those who have begun religions, all those who have launched new religious movements.

I am very interested by that because actually it is also true that it seems to be a pre-requisite that if you want to start a new religion, (if you are feeling like that this evening, do have a go) because maybe in this country you would find the right balance for that in some ways. In a very secularised country in which the secularisation takes some forms which I really love and think are wonderful and in other ways take some forms which leave people rather spiritually religiously rootless and dis-traditioned and free floating. It might be ripe soil for the emergence of a new religion, so do feel free, get started. If you do that, then you might go looking and say, what kind of example of religious leadership from those who have started great and effective and successful numerous and popular religions of the world, what kind of example did they give? Well, your first pre-requisite would be, would it not, coming from a wildly dysfunctional family, because Jesus, at the age of under two,

seems to have been an asylum seeker, an interesting take on the nativity story, isn't it?

Siddharta Gautama leaves all his citizen responsibilities behind him to pursue the enlightenment of Buddhahood and Moses, let's face it, a 40 year old murderer, who lives out 40 years in exile, from the country of his birth and the dysfunctional family stuff is being brought up by your own mother, who pretends for all your young life that she is your nurse maid in order that you may be accredited as the son of a princess. This kind of dysfunctional family backgrounds seems to me to be typical to those who launch and start religious communities and movements and if I go to my citizenship orders there and say "would those who began religions actually do well in citizenship lessons", then the answer is certainly no!

It says the requirement for five to seven year olds in the citizenship orders is to make and keep rules and laws. I doubt that Moses would have managed that with his non-negotiable "Let my people go" demand backed up with 10 plagues and including the particularly hideous plague of boils. And discussing negotiation and accommodation, key skills for conflict resolution, which are recommended for key stage 3 would not have worked very well for most of the students in the same class as the pharaoh. So that kind of sense of religious leadership with religious launching coming out of dysfunction, out of human communities, not at rest, out of human communities where the underside, the grass roots, the base line of community seems to have gone wrong. That is an intriguing feature of how religions begin and a start, and I just draw from it something that may be as pertinent to religious educators who approach questions of community and identity, key question of citizenship and religious education, then one of the things they may do is draw attention to what is considered not the norm What is considered marginal? What is considered on the edge of society? Good citizenship teaching will want to do that well, which is why Citizenship orders were prepared.

Consideration of what it means to be family and consideration of what community means and attention to the ethnic diversity and the smaller minorities that make up the national community of the UK today. All of that attention was given and was given properly and is well reflected in the Citizenship orders that we work with. So from the starting point lesson that religion seems to raise questions about national Citizenship especially if it is conceived on a single kind of model that says this is what it means to be a citizen. Let's all be like Tony Blair – that nearly slipped out. I do not think the Citizenship orders are meant to do that, but there are narrow visions of Citizenship, which seem to provide one model for all, and the RE over that 40 years of accommodating diversity of changing to associate itself with all of the religious communities and perhaps beyond that to the secularising of young people in our society today. RE has spent a lot of time learning that lesson and may contribute something there to Citizenship Studies. I am trying to look at this question from the point of view of the RE teacher. What is the frontier there between RE and Citizenship and because I meet loads and loads of RE teachers through my work (a couple of thousand every year). I actually get the feel of what they are saying about Citizenship. I do not know if you have noticed this, perhaps you are a teacher of RE and may be some of these feelings will be yours but certainly these ideas, what I have called jealousy, actually that jealousy of the RE teacher directed at Citizenship has emerged and is quite prominent.

Promoting Citizenship

I have got five reasons why RE teachers are in some ways jealous of Citizenship and its orders. The first of those is that there is absolutely massive central government finance and support for Citizenship as a new subject in the curriculum in ways that there have never been for RE. If Citizenship is to launch itself successfully into our schools (and I really hope it does), then it needs that kind of central government support and investment and it is not just the investment of finance and professional support that comes from the DFES and the QCA for Citizenship that makes the RE teacher jealous. It is also, actually, the huge national promotion that successive Secretaries of State, David Blunkett, Estelle Morris and Charles Clarke have been willing to do on behalf of Citizenship that they will come out and talk and give their name and promote through the Department Citizenship's place in the curriculum. As they carve out, elbow aside and make space for the new subject, sharing that the subject is promoted nationally by the Department of Education and Skills that makes some of the RE community jealous of the way Citizenship has had a prominent launch in the country.

Thirdly, some RE teachers pick out that Citizenship is in the national curriculum and RE basic curriculum, is not national curriculum and the marginalizing that has gone with that for RE over actually now 15 years is something that many teachers of RE have found in all that decade and a half, quite hard to swallow, but there it is. Citizenship is part of the national curriculum with the status, with the kudos that goes with that.

Fourthly resource providers, BBC, Channel 4 Learning, loads of publishers, all those involved in resourcing school curriculum have been scrabbling to create, broadcast and make new digital resources to fill the empty Citizenship cupboard that every secondary school and many primary schools have. I am glad that that has happened, but I understand why from the RE side, one of the reactions to that has been in some ways a professional jealousy.

Fifthly, I do not know if you are fed up with, but I must admit to being thoroughly sick of the headline "All aboard the Citizenship" that really should be consigned to the dustbin by "The Times Ed.", "The Guardian", "The Independent" and the education pages of journals, newspapers, weeklies and monthlies. The chattering classes chattering about Citizenship and its introduction and its innovative potentialities have hardly ever noticed that absolute RE at its best sometimes already does very well some of the things that are at the heart of Citizenship education, but then wherever I have made those points, I have also noticed and heard from Citizenship educators that a similarly jealousy back to RE. I wonder if you are on the RE side and you might disagree with me here that this might be the challenging bit of what I have to say to you.

Lessons from RE

Have you noticed that that Citizenship might also have several reasons to be jealous of what RE has secured in its way of working that includes, for instance, a Department for Education and Skills programme of study, some support from QCA that stretches back not two or three years but 15 years nearly now. Citizenship

teachers might look at the 57 years of legal requirement and entitlement for RE for all pupils on school role from age 4 through to age 19 that interests and absorbs SACRE here and in every local authority. Citizenship teachers might look at the GCSE examination entries rising faster in religious studies than in any other subject every year for the last six years to a peak now of 323,000 young people who in 2002 left school with a qualification in religious studies, a national accredited qualification, as the first time ever in that 57 years of compulsory RE that more than half of the children and young people from our schools have left with an RE, RS qualification and actually numbers for Citizenship are just beginning to lift off the bottom.

RE teachers ought to notice the strength that GCSE prominence gives them and the DFES has been keen to announce that Citizenship training for new teachers is running at 150 last year and 350 this year, but if you are concerned about Citizenship, you might look jealously over the fence and notice that there are in secondary schools across England perhaps 8,000 RE professionals, 8,000 qualified and active teachers of religious studies and those 8,000 people (of course, they are the people who my job exists to try and help and I love them dearly) have such an expertise at handling controversy in the classroom, such a set of skills at managing diversity in school, such a depth of understanding of what it is for the UK to be a community of communities that includes the Christian, the Muslim, the Hindu, the Humanist, the Buddhist, the Sikh, the Jew and the disassociated majority that when you say to them, "what religion are you", they reply, "I am nothing". RE teachers are good at that and Citizenship teachers are just beginning to feel the depth of difficulty that their professional task faces them with in doing that part of their job. So I just notice those things that there might be mutual jealousy between RE and Citizenship and if that happens, a bad thing can arise from that, can't it.

Open Frontiers

What can happen on the new frontier is that instead of an open frontier, an Euro style frontier in which you can drive your car across a frontier without even having noticing that you have done it, in which your Euros work on this side of the border and that side, in which common languages, two or three of them in some European contacts now, can be spoken by parties from both sides of the frontier instead of that, you get the barricade. You get the barbed wire entanglement, you get the trench dug between the territory of RE and the territory of Citizenship. Now, I think, I understand why that is sometimes happening, but, I think, that is a profound mistake. At the heart of what I have to say this evening is that, I think, the frontier between RE and Citizenship should not be barricaded, should not be set up with entanglements of barbed wire. It should be an open frontier, which children and young people can cross in school in lessons easily and smoothly and, I think, that will only happen if between RE and Citizenship, there is some sort of partnership with mutual esteem. That is what I would like to concentrate on in what I have to say to you in terms of examples of children's work.

Examples of children's work

Interfaith relations

The first of my examples takes the not too difficult issue of inter-faith relations down as low as it can go in school, and in this piece of work, we asked our pupils at Year 2, 7 year olds, if they would design a range of goods for the Inter-Faith Week of Prayer for World Peace. So picture, a class of seven year olds, in a school in Nottingham, Dovecoat Primary School, great RE Team there, an Islamic teacher is Deputy Head, a teacher who has a passing acquaintance with Buddhism, but is not committed to Buddhism as the RE co-ordinator, a number of teachers whose background are in Christianity who also teach the subject and out of that mix, out of that rich mix, they decided that they would like to tackle the Inter-faith issues with the youngest pupils possible.

So we made up this task, which is a distance and grounded task. It says there is each year in the 3rd week of October an Inter-Faith week of prayer for World Peace. The Inter-Faith Week for World Peace encourages people from different religious traditions to use whatever their religion offers them for meditation for reflection, for prayer, for petitioning the Almighty to use that as a way of expressing their own peaceful intent and to do it in context where they meet with people they do not usually meet with. If you are a Christian, you spend 51 weeks going to church, then in this week go to a mosque, take time at a synagogue, spend a bit of time at your SACRE maybe. As you do that, listen to the other side, listen to the "them" who you usually define your "us" against. As some people said to us, you cannot do this with these kids who are that young, you need to keep the inter-faith issues for 6th Form, for Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 3. So here I have for you a piece of living proof that seven year olds can understand the need for World Peace, and as they do so, they can express some kind of sense of the need for community between those who are different, they can have some understanding of what it is to disagree respectfully.

So these seven year olds were invited to make a range of promotional goods for the Inter-Faith Week of Prayer for World Peace. They could do bumper stickers, or mugs, or tee-shirts, or badges, or whatever they wanted to there, and these two produced for sale World Peace mugs. I love the symbolism they have here. I do not know if you can pick it apart, but the symbolism of the flower, the symbolism of the star, the symbolism of the world that they fill into their mug design, and other children went differently at this. Another couple of seven year olds made a World Peace Card. It looks to me, actually, like a ring of parachutists falling from a very great height but, actually, it is so carefully done. Every different hair colour, every different style of dress, holding hands to surround the world as they see it, and they ran out of symbols, but there are three symbols of different world religions indicative of their intent in that piece of work. We told people they could have three words on their designs if they want to, and two other seven year olds gave us this tee-shirt design "Think about others". That will do me for starters. I want seven year olds in schools whether it is in citizenship or in RE, or perhaps in a piece of curriculum time that cannot quite be labelled as either of those. I want seven year olds to notice not just that there are different religions, not just that people believe and practice differently, but people find different sorts of inspiration for life, but I want those children also to be given the chance through RE Citizenship to notice that the difference between

people need not be divisive. It can also be a source of diverse strength and beauty of human interaction. We do not want to be all the same.

Respectful Disagreement

Now I have moved from there to working with year fives. With year fives I became aware that many pupils struggled to express respectful disagreement, so with a Year 5 class, actually, in a very interesting school in Leicester, a brilliant RE teaching school where many of the pupils, quite a sizeable majority of pupils are Muslim children we took to Year 5 just this ever so simple task.

We gave pupils these eight sentence props :

I do not always enjoy talking to?
But I find that she, or he, makes me?

We asked pupils to work with those sentences. We suggested first of all that they write them for a character in the public eye so we have sets of the eight sentences written for Alex Ferguson and some of the lads find that very easy to do. We have sets of them written for Britney Spears. RE, actually, has this as one of its key skills that it can teach and be a model for respectful disagreement, not pushing all pupils to say the same, to be the same, to see the same, but out of the disagreements that they see, out of the identity that is distinctively their own, out of the significant things in their own family culture that matter to them and them only in their class.

I want them to be able to see that it might be worth modelling, it might be worth trying out attitudes of tolerance, more than that respect for those who see things differently, because that would be one of RE's key contributions to a Citizenship education, or to a whole education that said "I disagree with but I respect him or her, because..." So from those very simple starting points. Here we have some Year 5 sentences. I do not wish to plough through those, but I do wish to draw your attention to four of them. You can see that we have got disagreement with And not really liking Michael Owen and that is fair enough. What we found with this piece of work is that actually children found they have never been asked to do anything like this before and they found it novel and they found it quite difficult but enjoyable to find eight examples of respectful disagreement that were genuinely their own and would you just notice with me as you get down the page there these four.

First of all, "I do not agree with Ashley but I listen to him" Because he does not think of himself first its a kind of inter-personal respect founded on observation, isn't it? And I love it if 9 year olds can look around their class group and say, "actually there, he is like this". "I have noticed this about him". "He does not think of himself first" and that might be the basis for inter-personal respect.

I have then noticed two down from there. "I disagree with Gerard, but I respect him, because he makes a game a clean one". That is a really interesting point, isn't it? Isn't it nice to know that 9 year olds in their schooling get to notice things like that about each other and the team work that schools promote in 100 different ways and never just in RE but all around the ethos of a school, the promotion of that team work makes that the noticing of a contribution to community respect, so there is inter-

personal respect and there is community respect inside the school. I could not resist including “I argue with all the boys but I value that because it takes two to tango”. I do not know quite what you make with that but it sounds to me that there is certain precocity about a 8 year old who writes like that and I suspect that I might be able to pick her out in a class of 8 year olds, as the one 8 year old going on 18, but there we have two interesting aspects of Citizenship if you read in your academic literature about feminist approaches to Citizenship questions, then the feminist understanding of how Citizenship has often been male written, male dominated, male controlled, male defined is an interesting view from the sidelines again where paying attention to the margins may show you what you want with the centre. Actually in school, in Citizenship, in RE the challenge to inter-gender respect is also present and actually one of the things that happens in good RE is that the apparent sexism of any religious community can be unpacked and unpicked and explored and weighed up reasonably. I was so delighted that in amongst my little sample of eight bits of writing from 30 pupils, I got “I am different to Hindus but I respect them because they still have a heart like mine”, so delighted, because actually for many Muslim adults that is hard for them to say. For many in my community, I am in the Christian community and for many Christians adults in the community that I am part of, as a Christian being able to say something simple and respectful of members of another religion seems to be all too difficult for those with whom I share Christian fellowship, but children in school in RE find opportunities to disagree respectfully on the basis of shared humanity. So whether it is a contribution to personal respect or community respect or inter-gender respect or inter-religious respect, then I love the idea that RE and Citizenship studies can make a difference there.

“I have a dream”

Our third curriculum example picks up my favourite, my hero, I cannot really miss him out. Sorry about that but we are stuck with Dr Martin Luther King there. Such an interesting example of Citizenship, a bad citizen by almost every reckoning during his life time for so many people Dr King was the epitome of all that was wrong with the Southern States of America in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, but his story hallowed perhaps by an early death sanctified by the passage of time has become almost scriptural in the RE context and so many young people study from Dr Martin Luther King and his influence and impact upon society that racist society of which he was a part. I love that study but I hate it when it stops too soon.

I wonder if you have seen that in action or if you have noticed it in the way that Dr King is treated in the textbooks perhaps but what happens is that the study of Dr King and an analysis of the racism that he faced and the ways in which he mapped out, thought out and hammered out solutions to that racism on the basis of his Christian faith but also on the basis of a broader humanity than his faith gave him and then it stops. So what is it that makes King a study in RE rather than a study in history. I think, crucially, centrally that the study has a challenge for the pupil that there is an opportunity to learn from a key religious speaker for the pupil themselves and I will just give you three examples of tasks that we have tried out a lot that we think are successful and effective in getting that to happen is that the secondary pupils.

So for instance we play to pupils aged 11 Martin Luther King’s brilliant dream speech in which nine times over in the space of four minutes he identifies a dream. I have a

dream that my four little children will grow up to be judged from the basis of the content of their character, not the colour of their skin. They all like that and we ask pupils as you listen make a note of what were Martin's nine dreams and we ask them then go on for yourself. What nine dreams would you identify for yourself. It is interesting that the first time we ran this I was at school in Nuneaton trying it out and a girl said "Sorry I can't do this". "Why? What is difficult about it?" She said "I do not know what you mean by dreams" "What do you mean by dreams?" I do not go to school very often but I have still got the teacher's instinct that says, ask the question back. "Well, what do you think it means?" She said, "Well is it like ambitions" So, I said, "Well in a way it is like ambitions, but what is the difference between a dream and an ambition?" She had a little think. She said, "Well, I suppose ambitions are like for yourself and dreams are like for everyone". Good, that is fine. "Can you do the task now?" She said "Yes" and did.

The provocation that Dr King provides in articulating his anti-racist equality focussed dreams, the provocation that works for 11 year olds that they can then identify some aspirations that go beyond themselves, that go beyond the ego, that go beyond the selfish and say instead get some dreams for the community for the school for me in my communities that might be good Citizenship. Then we ask 13 year olds to do this task. "Would you please imagine that Dr King had not been shot and if he was still alive today he would be 72 this year. So we said if he was alive today and he came to your school then what would he say if he came through with your class a whole week. Imagine that Monday morning he joined your class and you know went to all your lessons and hung out with your break sat with you at lunchtime and walked home with you at the end of the day and he did that Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and then Friday the head teacher noticed that there is a new boy aged 72 in class 9b. Oh, it is you Dr King. Could you take assembly for us. If that happened what would Dr King say to your school to your community and again I do not bring you pieces of exceptional work here, these are pieces of work of ordinary work in many ways. Not done by supergifted, talented young people but just RE tasks that ask the Citizen question about racism or equality.

So here is a youngster who has given us this and I like this example because it is very simple but actually gets to the heart of some of what I was after. I am glad that my dream has come true Martin would say. Over the past week I have seen black children talking and socialising with my black and white children equal. I can see there are black children sitting next to white children. I am responding to the study she had done about segregation and she was able to identify those kind of aspects of King's vision that are a part of our society and which our society might take some pride in. She does not stop there. She goes on, there is another dream, there is a new dream. I have to address the amount of prejudice and discrimination that is going on in this school, get to know a person before you decide you do not like them and I know from noticing, looking at the ways in which key stage 3, year 7, 8 and 9 pupils relate to each other that every school has an issue still about racist stereotyping and the unequal treatment of people from racial minorities that is an issue in every school, sadly, still and it needs bringing to the fore and addressing in RE or in Citizenship education.

So you will see that I have put some notes down, you will see that I have not time now to take you through a third task but our third task there was for 15 year olds and

the title “The two greatest public speakers of the 20th Century – Martin Luther King and Adolf Hitler” compare the way that they used their oratorical gifts and in doing that we have drawn from pupils again some moral reflection some ideas about inter communal harmony and inter communal strife and how an individual can make a contribution to building up one or other of those. So in these simple examples whether it is the will to allow relationships and Citizenship to gets clearer and to be embedded into every school, then I think RE will open up the frontier for Citizenship, will ask sometimes awkward questions about the ways which national citizenship is a bit too prominent in the government’s Citizenship orders. This is postulated on privilege and advantage is postulated on creating a richer “us” compared to the poorer “them” of the whole wide world and if RE asks questions about second class citizenship which any idea of full citizenship can so quickly come to imply, if I re-ask? Those questions then the subject might make a bigger contribution to Citizenship education than you might expect from its relative lack of prominence.

Concluding points

As I finish I just notice that with a new subject in the curriculum, Citizenship that actually means that we can construct Citizenship as we wish to. I know the direction in which I want to build it up, the construction that I want to put on the idea of being a citizen, a global citizen, a national citizen in this country, this world, these days. I think, that new construction needs to bring the insights that come from faith into oppression and liberation, equality and injustice, freedom and constraint and there is insight to be found in Buddhism and Christianity and Islam into all of those topics as well as negatives to be observed too. But the RE teacher might bring some of those insights from faith to construct the meaning of citizen in ways that are global in their reach, that are transcultural in their awareness that gets right across between different cultures that are fluid enough to accommodate the religious diversity, of our societies as a welcome plurality that do not problematise diversity that do not say it is very difficult you know we are all different but instead make an opportunity out of that diversity. I do not think that RE’s contribution will be the only contribution to make citizenship work well, but I do think that RE teachers often have a special set of skills in handling those diversities - in handling those differences and controversies that are in some ways the bread and butter of what RE, at its best, has been doing well for a number of years. As we do that in the theological and religious field that we take children into in RE, some of the insights of the religions into what it means to belong will be fruitful for Citizenship too.

After a time for question and debate Lat Blaylock was thanked by Gillian Wood, Chair of Kingston SACRE.

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Martin Luther King: What kind of citizen? An example of Christian faith against racism

RE with 11-16 year olds often uses the life story of Dr Martin Luther King. Here are some ways which show how such work could be simultaneously excellent RE, excellent citizenship and excellent anti racist work.

Some good tasks for learning from religion and citizenship:

Set challenging tasks, not just those which require reduplication and regurgitation. How about these:

11 year olds: Nine dreams. Martin spoke of his dreams for humanity, nine times in his famous speech. What were they? What are your own nine dreams? Can you express them as carefully as Martin did?

13 year olds: If Martin was still alive, he would have had his 72nd birthday in 2002. Imagine he came to your school one Monday, and did everything with your class for a week, seeing all your attitudes and behaviour. If your head teacher asked Martin to take assembly on Friday, what would he say to you all? What would he like? What would he challenge? Have his dreams come true?

15 year olds: An essay title. The two greatest public speakers of the 20th Century were King and Hitler. Compare their rhetoric. Students might be guided by these questions: what motivated these two people? What did they believe in? How did they use their gifts? How did people feel when they spoke? What is their legacy to the human community? What have you learned from King and Hitler for your own life?

Some examples of pupils' dreams at Higham Lane School, Nuneaton:

'My dreams are that people don't just say words of wisdom, but make them come true. That people will look forward to a new day when people will have their own opinions, but never cause violence to express them.' Jo Davies

'I dream of a time when every person in every religion can get together with each other and pray together. I would love that to happen'. Laura Holmes

'My dreams: No more racism, sexism, prejudice or discrimination. No more war: races will become friends. No more cruelty to animals. We learn the meaning of life, we learn all the earth's greatest mysteries.' Lee Brown

Thanks to Lesley Cavill, and all the pupils who tried this work out.

RE teachers who deal with Dr King in an excellent way will incorporate these six points in their teaching:

1. King was part of a citizen's community, not just one 'leading man'. For example, Rosa Parkes was a leading non violent campaigner in her own right. Martin always worked with black, oppressed communities
2. King wasn't perfect. His biographers have much to say about possible unfaithfulness to his wife. His methods, motives, judgement and influence were all widely criticised in the 50s and 60s.
3. King is history to school children today. How can his story be made to relate to their situation?
4. Contemporary application is everything: without it there's no anti racist element to RE work on Martin Luther King, no learning from religion and no challenge to attitudes and values. The Macpherson report following the death of Stephen Lawrence shows the way forward here.
5. 'St Martin' stereotypes should be avoided: King was vilified widely in the 1950s, and his popularity was never unquestioned in the 60s, when many saw him as a deeply troublesome citizen of the USA. This poses the question: are today's 'bad citizens' often tomorrow's heroes? Think of Mandela!
6. Don't teach Martin Luther King without teaching about his deep connection with the Christian scriptures and tradition. All his rhetoric was shot through with the teaching and example of Jesus. His identity is firstly as a follower of Jesus. The 'editing out' of religion from citizenship is foolish, unfair, a travesty of history, but often widespread.

Recommended resource:

All this work is based on an audio taped version of Martin's speeches. As an RE and Citizenship resource, it's a gem: 'I have a dream' from the Peace Pledge Union, 41b Bracknock Road, London N7 OBT, 020 7424 9444.