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Islam and Citizenship Education – Lessons learnt from pilot programmes delivered in Muslim schools and Madrassa in the UK

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Abstract

This paper explores some of the hurdles to be overcome for formal faith based citizenship education to be taught more widely in the UK. It evaluates the curriculum content and modes of delivery of a pilot Islam and Citizenship Education programme highlighting the significance of the particular locational contexts; Madrassa and Muslim schools.

Following the 2005 bombings in London the UK government provided funding to support the creation of programmes to encourage social cohesion between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the UK. Seven years on some of these, including citizenship programmes, are still running and new programmes are being created. Our research studied the pilot of one of these programmes in 2012: ASDAN Islam and Citizen Education. The research took a mixed methodology approach including interviews, focus groups, observations and documentary analysis, evaluating the programme in the formal and informal teaching settings of Muslim Schools and Madrassa.

Privately funded, Muslim faith schools follow the UK national curriculum and Madrassa are usually informal settings teaching young Muslims the readings of the Qur'an. The research studied five of these settings as they implemented the accredited ASDAN programme. A stated intention of which was to provide nationally recognised accreditation for Islamic studies carried out in the Madrassa and Muslim schools. Introducing such programmes into mainstream schools as a vehicle for improving social cohesion is an underlying objective of this and other faith based citizenship programmes.

The research concluded that there were several issues and challenges that needed to be addressed before such programmes could successfully be used by both Muslim and non-Muslim populations. The main areas highlighted within this research include; learning and teaching approaches, human and physical resources and funding and community support. Similar issues and challenges could equally apply to other faith based citizenship learning programmes.

Keywords: *Citizenship Education, Islam, curriculum, teaching and learning*

Introduction

In the first decade of the new Millennium the relationship between citizenship education and issues, such as, ethnicity, national identity, social cohesion and faith based schooling, within the context of the United Kingdom, has been widely researched and debated (Hussain and Bagley 2001, Short 2002, Coles 2004, Phillips 2006, Flint 2007, Coles 2008). Flint (2007: 251), for example, reviews the discourse around faith schools and 'cohesive citizenship and national identity' drawing heavily on experiences of Roman Catholic state schools in Scotland in the 20th Century to illustrate parallels with 'the contemporary establishment of a Muslim state school sector' and how this might develop in modern day Britain. In brief, Flint (ibid) presents strong arguments to suggest that faith schools are as likely to present opportunities for promoting 'cohesive citizenship' and desirable national identities as other, multi-faith and multi-cultural, schools. Short (2002) reached the same conclusion:

I conclude that faith schools per se pose no threat, actual or potential, to a unified society. On the contrary, I contend that from an educational standpoint the critical determinant of social cohesion is the content of children's learning and not the type of school in which that learning takes place. (Short, 2002: 560)

Flint (2007: 261) goes even further stating that Faith schools can 'contribute to social cohesion by reducing disparities in educational attainment between different ethnic groups' and drawing upon Grace (2003), the Association of Muslim Social Scientists et al (2004) and MacMillan, (2005) he describes how:

The ethos and practice of both Catholic and Muslim schools promote an understanding of tolerance and religious diversity and provide a curriculum that is synonymous with the requirements of multicultural citizenship.

Schools, of whatever type, and the curriculum that they adopt, may provide a valuable platform for developing citizenship, greater community cohesion and religious tolerance within the wider population beyond those of school age. Within the last decade there have been several high profile incidents within the UK that have drawn attention to the need for a greater focus on issues, such as, citizenship and community cohesion. In 2001, for example, in the North of England, riots and public disorder resulted in the setting up of a Community Cohesion Independent Review Team, part of the ensuing discourse linked community cohesion with citizenship education. As Hussain and Bagguley (2001) wrote at the time:

The 2001 'riots', the political successes of the British National Party and the events after September 11 pushed British-Pakistani Muslims into the forefront

of national political conflicts around citizenship, national identity and allegiance to the state.

Coles (2004) identified a number of triggers for faith based civic unrest. He cites the rise of 'Islamophobia' within the UK, pointing out a number of factors that have contributed to this phenomenon:

The events of 9/11, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and various 'terrorist' attacks throughout the world have led to an increase in anti-Muslim sentiment, expression and action. For many Muslims the wearing of hijab, or having beards or turbans, or any dress code that can vaguely be associated with Islam, has led to overt hostility. Islamophobia is a relatively new term but a very old prejudice' (Coles, 2004: 41)

In 2005 the bombings in central London compounded what was already perceived as a growing problem for Muslims in the United Kingdom, potentially alienating them further, inciting (religious) intolerance and damaging aspirations for greater community cohesion in particular parts of the UK. Following the events of 2005, and the years leading up to 2005, the links between community cohesion, citizenship and citizenship education were brought even more to the fore, with British Muslim citizens a key target group within the UK population. Although much of the discussion below is focused on citizenship education in relation to school age children there are implications and expectations for potential impact within the wider communities of the schools and supplementary schools involved.

Coles (2004: 42) identified 15 strategies for a new strategic approach to Islam and education in the UK, two are particularly pertinent to the discussion of Islam and Citizenship Education. The first is his view that there is an 'omission of Muslim perspectives and of genuine recognition of Islamic civilisation from the school curriculum...' Coles (ibid) goes on to point out that 'this serves to undermine the confidence of Muslim pupils' and significantly that it 'miseducates non-Muslims by implicitly denying the shared histories and narratives that make up pluralist Britain and pluralist Europe'. The articulation of these views laid a strong foundation for consideration of how Citizenship education could/should be developed within the school based curriculum as a whole within the UK. Furthermore, the second of the two drivers identified from the work of Coles (ibid) leads to a more broad based consideration of where Citizenship education could/should be accessed within the many learning and teaching contexts beyond those of mainstream education, and how closer links might be made between the mainstream curriculum and approaches to learning and teaching and supplementary educational contexts, such as, madrasah and other faith based learning environments. The second of the drives selected from Coles (ibid) states:

Closer links between mainstream schools, mosques and madrasahs will benefit all Muslim pupils, help raise attainment in the mainstream, and support attempts madrasahs may wish to make in changing their pedagogic style (p 42).

As an aside, an observation by Coles (2004) should be noted as it highlights difficulties associated with discussing a population described as 'Muslims' as if it is one uniform section of the community:

Britain's Muslims are a community of communities. They can be divided by ethnic, cultural, linguistic and historical factors that often mean that outside their faith background they have little in common. Even within the faith, there can be huge differences between Sunni and Shi'ah, between Barelvis and Deobandis, between the Wahhabis and the Sufis' (Coles 2004: 43)

There is, therefore, a need for caution as any identified group is likely to be multi-faceted and such terms can only be used as broad descriptions for the purpose of facilitating discussion of issues that may affect particular sections of the overall population of a country.

Context

As discussed above the context of the Islamic and Citizenship Education course development sits within the era following 9/11 and 7/7 where hostility in the UK towards Muslims was growing and there were concerns around increased extremism in UK Muslim communities. Following the perceived success of the Islam and citizenship work of the Nasuha Project in Bradford and the Building Bridges Pendle Project, the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Communities and Local Government, as part of the Prevent Strategy (2008), jointly funded the development of a citizenship programme of study aimed at independent Muslim schools and madrasahs based on the teachings of Islam. The School Development Support Agency (SDSA) was funded to create a programme that was based on the national citizenship programme that UK schools use but with the addition of Islamic guidance as it was felt that citizenship values and Islamic values are broadly compatible. The SDSA used the funding to support the Islam Citizenship Education project and they created the Islam Citizenship Education course (ICE)

The SDSA ICE project initially ran over an 18 month period and was primarily designed to support a citizenship curriculum in madrasahs aimed specifically at those aged 9 to 14 (Key Stages 2 and 3). The purpose of the programme was many fold:

- To teach about Islamic tradition, values and their roles and responsibilities in society as good Muslims;
- To promote Citizenship education in madrasahs;
- To pull together and build upon the existing work done by many British Muslim communities in teaching Citizenship education;
- To develop suitable materials that can be used by mainstream schools to teach Islamic values in the citizenship curriculum;

The forty four printed lessons and six additional downloadable ones, follow the same three-part format and in each pupils discuss essential citizenship and Islamic values. All lessons have Qur'anic guidance and most have supportive ahadith, or stories. As well as lesson plans there is accompanying teacher guidance notes and frequently asked questions; to gain acceptance by Muslim communities and within the madrasahs the programme was endorsed by a wide range of Islamic scholars and organisations, representing most of the major Sunni and Shia schools of thought. There are two versions: one aimed at Key Stage 2 age pupils and one at Key Stage 3.

The materials although primarily for use in madrasahs were created with the view that they could be used in mainstream schools as well, particularly where significant numbers of Muslims would also be able to access them. In using these materials in mainstream schools the citizenship curriculum could be taught using Islamic exemplars and this would complement and broaden the existing citizenship curriculum.

Following a further funded pilot phase in several independent Muslim schools an evaluation was carried out of the SDSA programme and two of the findings were:

- There was a desire for there to be some form of accreditation of the course to recognise the effort made by the pupils and to increase the value of the course making it more desirable for inclusion of the curricula of Muslim, independent and mainstream schools.
- Muslim schools funding is limited and can be an issue with many being run on very low budgets. So the SDSA ICE course gave these schools an excellent affordable resource which had a significant impact, as it provided an in-depth resource for use in the classroom with a structured route for teaching Islam and citizenship.

In light of these evaluation findings and personal links between those involved in the SDSA programme and pilot, ASDAN were approached to determine whether it would be

possible for the learning to be accredited by a nationally recognised and reputed organisation. From these initial discussions ASDAN were able to obtain further funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to help create materials for a short course and run a pilot of their accredited programme over two years starting in 2011. This research paper stems from the findings of an evaluation carried out for the pilot phase of the ASDAN Islam and Citizenship Short Course.

Methodology

The research was carried out as a programme evaluation with a significant focus on process, identifying strengths and challenges for effective and efficient future delivery. Drawing upon literature on 'Evaluation by illumination' (Parlett and Hamilton (1987), Chemow (2007)) it adopts a mixed methods approach, though these were mainly qualitative involving semi-structured interviews and focus groups; along with classroom and meeting observations and documentary analysis. The period of research was undertaken throughout the creation and the pilot of the ASDAN Islam and Citizen Education Programme. The research was to carry on into the introduction of the course throughout the country for a further year but for reasons that are explained in the findings the progression of the implementation was slower than expected and funding was not available to carry on with the research. Therefore the research ran for a one year period between July 2011 and July 2012. The research focused on five of the nine pilot institutions in different parts of England (including Luton, Leicester, Bristol and Birmingham). A case study was produced for each institution which included interviews with the institution leaders such as School Heads and Mosque leaders, staff/volunteers, focus groups with the young people, observations of the teaching of the modules, details of the nature of the institution and analysis of the documentation produced by ASDAN and the institution in relation to the implementation of the ASDAN ICE programme. The research encompassed two Muslim schools, two madrasahs and one group of Muslim pupils from a mainstream school that is centred in a Muslim community, and has a large Muslim intake, that undertook the ASDAN ICE programme as an extra curricula addition to their studies. The researchers also interviewed the ASDAN staff involved in creating and implementing the programme and observed a number of meetings between ASDAN and those pilot institutions.

Findings

Teaching and Learning within the ASDAN ICE Short Course

Curriculum, materials and resources

From a teaching perspective the ASDAN ICE Short Course provided a useful framework for structuring and supporting aspects of Islamic teaching required by Muslim children

as part of their faith studies. Feedback from all of the stakeholders working on the ASDAN ICE pilot course (young people, teachers and madrasahs staff) indicate that the activities were well written and were suitable for all branches of the Islamic faith.

Having the original SDSA ICE course materials freely available online seemed particularly advantageous as it provided lesson plans and subject resources at both Key Stage 2 and 3, these were referred to by teachers and several of the tutors in the madrasahs. As although Muslim schools were able to access a broad range of materials and plans as a result of delivering topics relevant and related to the ASDAN ICE Short Course within, for example, Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship, they faced challenges of their own in terms of funding and generally struggled to obtain good resources and access to resources.

Madrasahs also have to cope with limited funding, which is usually provided by the parents of the young Muslims attending with some local community support. Madrasahs have even greater challenges than schools as not only do they not have access to the materials related to PSHE and Citizenship, they may also lack resources, such as computers which are not generally available to tutors or students while in attendance at the madrasahs. As a consequence the main methods of delivery may be note taking and hand-outs and a reliance on students having access to computers at home for task completion.

Planning and delivering teaching and learning activities

School teachers are professionally trained and as such are familiar with following schemes of work and preparing associated learning activities for young people. In madrasahs many of the tutoring staff are volunteers with no prior teaching experience. Therefore, planning teaching activities for the ASDAN ICE Short Course should not be as challenging for trained teachers as it could be for some of the unpaid volunteers tutoring in madrasahs. The overall success of such programmes will also depend upon the ability of the school teachers and madrasahs tutors to grasp the teaching and learning approach such as those particular to ASDAN where the focus is task and student centred. A number of interviewees indicated that madrasahs tutors would need to attend training courses in order to deliver the modules effectively and that these courses would need to be reasonably regular given the turnover of volunteers that some madrasahs appear to have.

In addition to the difficulties associated with resources and training outlined above, in some madrasahs the age range and number of young people involved provide a further challenge: Attendance in madrasahs is from 4 – 14. And the research found that the ASDAN short Course was expected to be taught to attendees as young as 5 or 6. It is

usual for young Muslims to stop attending the madrasahs once they have completed the Islamic teaching and learning of the Qur'an. In the majority of cases this is around the age of 12/13. It was felt that for many of the younger students while the learning of Islamic faith was appropriate, the completion of the majority of the tasks was not suitable. Furthermore, within the madrasahs time is limited and dropout levels from the course appear to be high as the young people had to fit ASDAN sessions in and around other madrasahs classes. The challenge of running such courses in madrasahs is compounded by the fact that homework is not usual or expected by the young Muslims, or their parents, in relation to the madrasahs.

Culture, tradition and expectations may have a significant impact on the delivery of the ASDAN ICE Short Course in at least some madrasahs. Interviews with participants indicated that madrasahs fulfil a very specific function and that this may not sit comfortably with the content and learning approaches of citizenship programmes.

The structure of sessions observed in some Schools and the madrasahs was quite formal, with the adult in control of the learning environment and the young people sitting still for much of the time. Young people's engagement was often limited to responding to questions or listening to answers to specific questions that had to be addressed as part of the learning experience. This seems in contrast to approaches to teaching and learning observed in other contexts where ASDAN programmes are delivered, these tend to involve more experiential learning with young people working in groups sharing their ideas and experiences.

The Curriculum

The school teachers and madrasah tutors interviewed for the research were enthusiastic about the opportunities that such courses provided for them and the young people that they worked with. However, if such learning is to be accredited then there is a need to implement strategies to enable the sharing of best practice and to provide quality assurance, this would reassure centres and enable them to achieve the high quality outcomes that they are keen to achieve for the young people they are working with.

School staff indicated that within Muslim schools such short courses sit well within the Citizenship and PHSE programmes and Religious Education classes. They could clearly see where it sat within the curriculum and they felt that the resources provided were appropriate, as a result they felt that they had no difficulty in being able to deliver the course. Both schools and madrasahs saw it as a valuable addition to the curriculum offer and the challenge for them was more about how to fit it in rather than should they offer it. Indeed the delays to the implementation of the ASDAN course in the majority of schools and madrasahs, which effected the timing of the evaluation, appears to be mainly

down to being able to find room in the current curriculum to add the course. In madrasahs this was due to the limited amount of time young Muslims spend there and the existing programme that needed to be completed. The ASDAN ICE Short Course was recognised as adding value to the school curriculum and as sitting well alongside the national curriculum, one interviewee's observation that "once the pilot's over we're going to run it" is an indication that there was likely to be take-up beyond the funded pilot phase.

The young Muslims involved felt that the activities and the portfolio were easily attainable. In one centre the ICE pilot was delivered through activities directly linked to another programme. This enabled young people to build evidence for both programmes concurrently, effectively 'double badging' their learning. This seemed to motivate the young people, helped them to build their confidence and communication skills and provided them with achievement/qualifications in leadership and citizenship. It also supported staff in planning by structuring activities to cover the content required for citizenship alongside the development of leadership skills.

Accreditation and Qualifications

It was clear from the adults and young people that were interviewed in Muslim schools and the madrasahs that accreditation that led to a qualification was a particularly significant factor. The young people mentioned that such short courses would give them the teaching they required for their religion, and that it could be done at their school, but also that they were motivated by the fact that it would be accredited and lead to a qualification. The teachers seemed motivated by the pupils gaining qualifications additional to GCSEs:

Some leaders and, we were told, parents, would like some form of national accreditation of the learning that happens within the madrasahs. They are not necessarily looking at something at GCSE level but something that would be seen as being of value to the students. Although no parents were interviewed within this research, several interviewees commented that they thought parents would be prepared to pay for resources and materials if the learning was given nationally recognised accreditation. The research was taking place at the time that a review of GCSE equivalent qualifications was taking place in the UK and there was concern that courses that do not lead to GCSE equivalent qualifications could be negatively affected by the review. It was clear amongst the pupils that the accreditation aspect was important and in many cases was the main motivation for doing the course.

However, there were mixed views expressed about the desirability of accredited learning within the different madrasahs and the views expressed above need to be balanced

against the fact that madrasahs are not used to accreditation and don't want to credit in the same way as schools do. Madrasah tutors are most often not experienced teachers; they've been merely employed because of their Islamic knowledge.

In schools, adjusting to delivering non-national curriculum and non-traditional GCSE courses could present initial challenges. School staff indicated that if the short course was not likely to lead to a nationally recognised qualification – such as a GCSE, they would likely still continue with the course as it would be away of accrediting the Islamic learning but rather than do it with Year 10 students it is likely that they would do it with Year 8 or 9 students and it would form part of the teaching of the citizenship curriculum at that level.

Pupils/young people in Muslim schools and Madrassas

The pupils/young people involved in the pilot ASDAN ICE Short Course appeared to enjoy the sessions and were particularly positive about the use of group work and Information and Communication Technology within the sessions. Those interviewed could see that the skills required to create the portfolio were transferable to other areas of their study – particularly the research skills – and both students and staff could see the advantage of developing presentation skills and group work skills outside of the school environment:

In one madrasah where pupils as young as 5/6 years old were working on the ASDAN ICE Short Course one person explained that this was because the material matched what they would have been learning at that age group in the madrasah. It was unclear as to how the portfolio would be created with this age group; however the teacher implied that they would do certain exercises in class together with her help. In two of the Muslim schools visited the course was being taught to those in Year 10 and Year 11. In one situation it was being incorporated into the Citizenship and PHSE programme and in the other it sat alongside the ASDAN Leadership Programme. However, it was felt that given the amount of time that is required to complete the portfolio and the thought that it might detract from time spent on other subjects, it was likely that it would be put into the Year 8 or 9 curricula in future – or even into Year 7.

Using ICE in Mainstream schools

It is the long term aspiration of ASDAN that the course is taken up by mainstream schools as part of the Citizenship and/or Religious Education Curriculum. When looking at the detail within the modules, without the help of Arabic speaking tutors, it was a concern of the researchers that this may not be possible. However, when deeper analysis was done it was clear that there is enough choice amongst the modules that the course should still be able to be completed by a non-Muslim, especially in light of the fact that

Religious Education teachers are expected to have knowledge of all faiths. Although the number of exercises that non-Muslim students/teachers could complete would be reduced the majority of those interviewed indicated that they should still be able to complete modules, as long as someone with a good knowledge of the Qur'an or the faith was available to speak to the pupils.

The evidence suggests that at present for it to be completely successful in a mainstream school it was felt that the school would ideally have a large Muslim intake to be able to gain the most from the course as although completing modules is still possible as a non-Muslim many of the activities require the interviewing of a Muslim, speaking to local Muslims or researching events in the local Muslim community.

The Pilot

The pilot and the research did not run as originally envisaged. There was some delay and indeed resistance to introducing the programme to the madrasahs even though the majority indicated they were looking to have the Islamic studies accredited. Discussions at a support meeting indicated that elders and parents had some misunderstandings around the meanings of citizenship and democracy within the context of the course. One person reported that there had been questions raised as to whether the course was required to gain British Citizenship and others had misunderstandings around the discussions of democracy, incited by the political unrest in several Muslim countries at present, there were concerns over whether the course may have an underlying political rhetoric. These concerns were reinforced during our interviews with participants.

It was felt that these types of concerns could easily be allayed and support more easily garnered if the course had open support of Islamic leaders, with a forward written by high profile Muslim leaders of the main Sunni and Shia arms of the religion.

Conclusions

The pilot ASDAN Islamic Citizenship Education programme has given us insights into opportunities and challenges for developing other faith based citizenship education programmes. Although the focus of this paper was to explore the hurdles to be overcome when designing faith based citizenship education programmes it also mentions some of the very positive attributes, not least motivating young people to positively engage with wider aspects of the curriculum than the UK's National Curriculum covers and the positive impact that embedding religion, culture and community engagement into young peoples' learning experiences can have. It is also relevant to note there was

no indication from the research that there was any impact on social cohesion as was the original intention of the funding of such programs.

It is important that aims and intentions of any citizenship programme are clearly articulated for the key stakeholders to avoid confusion as this can have a negative impact on participation in such a programme (for the ICE programme stakeholders include the Islamic leaders, elders, madrasah tutors, school teachers, parents and pupils). There is a need for further investigation of the appropriate age for young people to be working on programmes, such as, the ASDAN ICE Short Course so that they might gain maximum benefit from the learning and personal development that it can provide in line with and complementary to the Citizenship National Curriculums, such as that for England, (DfEE, 1999) which is for Key Stage 3 and 4 only.

Consideration of the teaching approaches that are best suited to the delivery of a programme are also important as we observed considerable differences across the different settings from didactic teacher led approaches to inductive and constructivist approaches where students were supported and encouraged to formulate answers and produce personalised portfolio evidence for assessment. The nature and extent of resources in the different school and supplementary school settings, in particular resources to support technology enhanced learning, raised concerns that will need to be addressed when/if designing other faith based citizenship education programmes if young people are to have equality of opportunity. This is a particularly significant factor for achieving best practice in teaching and learning and enabling young people to achieve high quality outcomes.

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