

# 10.

## How far is Islam a religion of peace?

A multipoint video conference - a special event addressing a topical issue

**Schools Involved:**

**Ilfracombe College, North Devon**

**King Edward VI Community College, Totnes, Devon**

**The King's School, Ottery St. Mary, Devon**

**Sidmouth College, Devon**

**Background:** This is an example of a presentation to three sites by a fourth, followed by interactivity, work off-line and a final presentation on line. The video conference was planned as a positive response to the atrocities of September 11th, 2001. It was co-ordinated by Devon's Religious Education Adviser, Mark Brimicombe.

**School Contacts:** *Ilfracombe College:* Judith Larrington, assistant principal and head of religious education, and Mike Wilkie, religious education teacher. *King Edward VI Community College:* Gail Snodin and members of the religious education department. *The King's School:* Ed Pawson. *Sidmouth College:* Celia Fox.

**Speakers:** Shabir and Kauser Ahmed from the Islamic Centre of the South West together with two young people from the centre.

### Aims of Video Conferencing Session

- To hear members of the Islamic community of the south west describing their experiences and expressing their opinions
- To enable the students to speak with members of the Muslim community
- To address the paradoxical issues of the description of Islam as a religion of peace based on the Quran and the Prophet's teachings in the light of a more violent interpretation of Islam as expressed in some areas of the media and some Muslims.

### Curriculum Context

Key Stage 3 religious education and citizenship. A special event for four invited schools who arranged for a class in each school to devote a morning to religious education; two of these had been studying Islam and for the other two it was an opportunity for anti-racist education. *The following aspects of the attainment targets were addressed:*

- AT1A Gaining understanding of Muslim beliefs and attitudes
- AT1B Learning about the values of the Islamic community
- AT2A Developing skills of asking and responding to questions relating to experiences
- AT2C Reflecting on their own values and commitments in the light of those interviewed.

### Planning, Research and Preparation

Details of the key questions were negotiated and the students' prior learning was established through telephone links. Based on these discussions, the speakers were given a clear brief that was put into writing.

Collecting and brainstorming ideas for lesson content and pupil participation/ presentations, using: Textbooks • Videos • Other information (e.g. Oxfam material on 11th September)

- Internet
- Newspaper cuttings and pictures
- Passages from the Qur'an, the Bible, etc.

A plan for the whole morning was produced in each school, resources were prepared and room layouts planned. Arrangements were made to use the multipoint bridge at Arbour Vale School and test calls were made.

## The Video Conference

**Session 1:** (45 minutes) An on-line presentation by Muslims, who were speaking to pupils in a school in south Devon and linked to the three other schools across Devon. Shabir gave an outline of Muslim life and practice. Kauser presented a summary of Muslim beliefs and teachings about war. There was an opportunity for pupils from each centre to ask questions, some of which were directed to and answered by the young people. This transmission was concluded and it was agreed to link up again after 45 minutes.

During this time, students in each centre discussed the issues presented to them and prepared a presentation of their own in response.

- Sidmouth decided on a TV report format, in which most participated as interviewers, interviewees and presenters. Some produced background posters, which in the end were not used. Interviews were set in New York and Birmingham and included pupils role playing Muslim and Christian perspectives.
- Ilfracombe split into three groups working independently using drama, art and music. Their presentation included a rap and a special edition of Blind Date.
- King Edward VI Community College worked on posters on personal creeds. An added bonus for this school was for the pupils to be able to work with the two Muslim young people. They made valuable contributions to the discussions.
- The King's School, Ottery St. Mary, produced posters illustrating the key issues.

**Session 2:** (45 minutes): the multipoint linkup was restored and each school made their own presentations, to which the speakers made their own responses. The session ended with pupils in each centre being asked to outline what they had gained from the morning and to give their answers to the key questions that had been addressed.

## Technical Issues

- Technical planning was important because most of the religious education staff had had no experience of video conferencing. Technical support and a link-up the day before were useful on this occasion. Jo Gatehouse, the technician at Arbour Vale School, monitored the conference and was available to address any technical issues involving the bridge.
- Initially, camera work was tricky, but with practice, this improved. The time delay was off-putting.

- One school reported that for an in-depth examination of these issues, a longer period would have been useful. Pupils needed more time to explore the relationship between Muslim teachings about peace, and the events of September 11th.
- Sound quality from other centres was not always good, especially where there were role plays or pupils talking about their posters. Positioning of pupils in relation to microphones needs careful consideration.
- With the current equipment, movement is sometimes blurred during transmission.
- Any inattentive pupils are clearly seen by the other centres.

**These issues could be resolved by:** 1. a faster link, which will happen as the technology develops. 2. The development of presentation skills, which should happen with greater familiarity with the technology.

## Evaluation of Learning Outcomes

- Pupils learnt a great deal, both directly and indirectly. This was a novel and positive experience for those involved.
- The opportunities for collaborative learning in classroom were creative and interactive.
- Increased understanding of Islamic beliefs and values.
- Good opportunities for exploring stereotypes and group/personal identity.
- Put recent issues relating to Islam of 11th September attacks and war in Afghanistan in some perspective.
- For some pupils, this was the first time they had been able to 'meet' Muslims and so it gave "depth and substance" to their studies. The technology enables pupils to have contact with members of faith communities that are not available in their localities.

## Ideas for Potential Development

- Since this experiment, one school has established a video conferencing link with a primary school in Slough. 12 Year 8 students (most of whom had participated in the original link-up) talked to a group of Year 6 Muslim pupils during a lunchtime. This took place during Ramadan, and there was genuine interest amongst pupils about this aspect of Muslim life.
- Another school has made more links and these are reported elsewhere.
- All schools agreed that the medium presents a valuable method of making contacts with people from other communities.
- Video conferencing will also be considered for the development of post-16 religious education. Its use for presentations by speakers on issues of concern for core religious education will be explored.
- The medium could also be useful in schools where there is a need for a collaborative approach to the teaching of small AS and A2 courses, which may be uneconomic in a single institution.

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