



Case Study: Building Resilience



As part of the 'Building Resilience' project with the Association for Citizenship Teaching, I decided to focus on how misconceptions of Islam and Muslims can lead to young people developing extreme right-wing views because our students are predominantly from a White British background. The project was focused on year 7, as all the other year groups in school had already had one-off lessons about extremism.

The project was designed to last for four lessons. The first lesson was very much designed to be a baseline lesson, where the students 'drew' what they thought a Muslim looked like (they drew women wearing hijabs and other common stereotypes). They then were asked to discuss how Islam and Muslims were portrayed in the media (their comments were generally quite negative).



This led into the second lesson, in which we were fortunate enough to have the Multi-Faith Centre (www.multifaithcentre.org) to come in and discuss 'The Truth' about Islam in comparison to the stereotypes and misrepresentations that some students may have held. Ruth Richardson (the youth worker from the Multi-Faith Centre) was able to bring in Iman, Abdul Mateen, to discuss this with our students. This lesson was an incredible success. Abdul and Ruth delivered a very informative lesson and answered some extremely difficult and controversial questions from our students about issues around terrorism and women's rights in Islam. What struck me in this lesson was how engaged and willing to take part our students

were and the Multi-Faith Centre representatives commented that some of the questions asked by our students were more informed and more challenging than when they had delivered a similar session with first year university students.



The effectiveness of this lesson was clearly shown in the final two lessons. Our students had clearly benefited from the visit from the Multi-Faith Centre representatives and had started to question why they had developed misconceptions about Muslims. We then looked in depth about why people believed negative things about Islam and we started to compare the negative portrayal of Muslims to the negative portrayal of young people in the media. One comment that stood out during these lessons was, 'Not all teenagers are bad, but they are shown in a negative way in the media. It is the same for Muslims'. The final task was a risk but it worked better than I could ever have expected. I gave our students a list of 'right-wing' statements about Muslims and asked them to come up with a peaceful way to respond. Not only were our students able to create their own responses but some of them got visibly annoyed about 'lies' about Muslims, frequently commenting: 'Why would people say that, it is just not true'.

The lessons far exceeded my expectations and were an incredible success. I was very proud that my students were completely open to challenging their own misconceptions and were keen to explore how these were developed. The lesson with the Multi-Faith Centre was critical to the success. I am hoping to put these lessons into our year 7 curriculum and I am meeting with the Multi-Faith Centre early in the next academic year to look at ways to do this.

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