

Procedure

Young people apply the five features of us/them thinking in Handout 28 to various news cuttings, or else to stories they have heard about. The purpose is to expand the various statements in the boxes by adding illustrative examples.

They may then look at the seven views of the world summarized in Handout 30, and similarly expand some of the statements with illustrative examples. Again, the language here may well need simplifying or explaining, and some of the historical references will need to be explained.

Identity, Empowerment and Change, Handout 29

Muslims and the police, a news story

Scotland's first Muslim Police Association is being created in an attempt to encourage more Muslims to join and stay in the force.

Strathclyde Police hopes the group will also help tackle Islamophobia and improve understanding of Islam.

PC Amar Shakoor, who was Scotland's first Muslim officer, said negativity had recently been directed towards the Muslim community. He said the association hoped to put Islam in a more positive light.

'We want to highlight some of the positive things Islam can provide to the communities and not just the police services,' he said.

According to PC Shakoor, since the 9/11 World Trade Centre attack, London tube bombings and Glasgow airport attempted bombings, Muslims have faced suspicion and increasing scrutiny.

He said links were now more important than ever and one of the best ways to do this was to recruit more Muslim officers.

Strathclyde Police, which has more than 7,000 officers, has only about 31 Muslim officers among its ranks.

Earlier this year, Chief Constable Steve House met Muslim officers in England who had started a similar group. It has been quite successful, not only within the Muslim community, but also in tackling institutional issues within their own police forces.

But a big part of what the Muslim Police Association here in Scotland hopes to achieve is to encourage young Scottish Muslims, who might not otherwise consider a career with the police, to see it is a viable option - somewhere they can move up the ladder and become part of the establishment.

Chief Constable House said: 'The formation of the Muslim Police Association is a positive step'.

'These are officers who are positive about seeing the police force as a career and want to use their association to reach out to Muslims. They are not saying "Don't join the police, it's a bad career move", they are saying look, "Come and join, we're happy with our career choice, come and join".'

However, some young Scottish Muslims were not sold on the idea of becoming officers.

I met two young men at a chip shop in Pollokshields, a largely Muslim area of Glasgow. They said they would never join the police because their experiences with them had been largely negative.

But they supported the idea of a Muslim Police Association, especially if it meant more Muslim officers patrolling the areas in which they live.

One said: 'For Muslims especially, police are not our best friends. If you get a few Muslim people patrolling the area it'd be a good thing, especially on Eid and stuff like that. They think it's fights but really people are just celebrating. So a lot of stuff can be misinterpreted depending on who's patrolling the area'.

But getting more Muslim police officers in Muslim areas is easier said than done. There are only about 30,000 Muslims living in the Strathclyde region, making up just 1.5 per cent of the population so the number of recruits per capita will always be small.

But there is another issue at play.

Chief Constable House says Muslim police officers are just that – police officers. And they do not want to be treated any differently or be forced to police only one community.

Source: BBC Scotland, Friday, 9 May 2008.

Follow-up discussion: the concept of open-mindedness

The journalist Peregrine Worsthorne has said that Islam was 'once a great civilization worthy of being argued with' but now 'has degenerated into a primitive enemy fit only to be sensitively subjugated'. He makes two distinctions in this claim, the one to do with content ('great civilization'/'primitive enemy') and the other with regard to forms of thinking and relating ('argued with'/'subjugated'.) To see an individual or a group or a civilization as 'worthy of being argued with' is necessarily to be open-minded towards them. The hallmarks of open-mindedness include:

- readiness to change one's views, both of others and of oneself, in the light of new facts and evidence
- not deliberately distorting, or recklessly oversimplifying, incontestable facts
- not caricaturing the views of people with whom one disagrees
- not over-generalizing
- not being abusive when arguing, for example not claiming that one's opponents are evil or insane or sub-human
- not using double standards when comparing and contrasting others with oneself
- seeing difference and disagreement as a resource for understanding more about oneself, not as a threat
- seeking to understand other people's views and standpoints in their own terms, and where they are coming from – the narratives and stories with which they interpret events
- not claiming greater certainty than is warranted
- seeking consensus or, at least, a modus vivendi which keeps channels of communication open and permits all to maintain dignity.