

Activity 17

Who and what's out there?

– blogs and websites

Summary

Young people visit a number of British Muslim blogs and websites, and say what they like and dislike about them. Also, they create scrapbooks with extracts from them and perhaps posters and wallcharts as well. Further, they write and submit comments. They may in addition create a blog on which they post their own reflections about current happenings.

Why?

The benefits that young people gain from this exercise include the following. They:

- have enhanced self-esteem and confidence in their own abilities to learn and to make a difference
- develop knowledge and understanding of the teachings, values and wisdom of Islamic traditions, and appreciation of Islam's diversity as well as of its unity, both in the present and in the past
- develop knowledge and understanding of the nature and consequences of racisms in society, including Islamophobia
- use their imaginations to consider other people's experiences in order to think about, express, explain and critically evaluate views that are different from their own
- consider critically how the media present stories, information and explanations
- gain in readiness to look critically at the influences and pressures they experience, and in resilience and strength to withstand those they consider harmful
- identify what is valuable in the teachings and influences of others and of the past, and make it their own.

Young people may in addition, of course, develop and practise skills in website evaluation, construction and design.

Preparation

You need a list of websites and blogs, briefly annotated. There is a substantial list in Appendix E of this pack. It is far from exhaustive, however. Instead or as well, you can provide quotations from a number of sites to give a flavour of what they may contain, as in Handout 31.

Comment

A teacher who used this during the piloting stage of this pack mentioned that it didn't work quite as planned. 'Students seemed to believe everything that they read on the net and couldn't grasp the concept of reliability and credibility of sources. We spent quite a lot of time discussing a site one student found that was anti-Muslim though moderate in its language.'

Procedure

Young people surf the Internet and write reviews and descriptions of the websites they find most valuable. They may:

- submit copies of their reviews to some of the websites under consideration, hopefully for publication
- send email messages to some of the sites or blogs
- post their reviews and comments on a website or blog created by themselves.

Identity, Empowerment and Change, Handout 31

Who's out there? – Starting points for webquest

Open circle for open minds

'The City Circle promotes the development of a distinct British Muslim identity. It seeks to assist the process of community cohesion and integration by building bilateral strategic alliances between Muslim and non-Muslim communities and harnessing and channelling the skills and resources of Muslim professionals into practical projects, thereby facilitating and empowering young Muslim women and men to "put back in" to the wider British community.'

<http://www.thecitycircle.com/index>.

Dynamic British Muslim community

'Whilst we undertake work and develop projects that impact nationally and even internationally, we passionately believe that we also need to foster and nurture the local community in which we live and work.'

'So from this Centre we have regular meetings sharing our experiences with researchers, journalists and documentary makers, professionals and others who consult us on Muslim issues. From here we also develop creative ways to support the development of the wider and local British Muslim community. This is where we put into practice our ideas and vision of developing a dynamic British Muslim community.'

'This is our space. Here, we feel safe and comfortable. Young people and women tell us they find they can be themselves here. This is a space where women, children and young people get together on their own terms. There are very few places where Muslim women can have the freedom to think for themselves and develop their own way of being.'

<http://www.an-nisa.org/>

Islam and democracy

We want younger Muslims to make choices for themselves. For far too long British Muslims have lived in a democracy but have not matured into autonomous democrats. The expectation is that communities take direction from community leaders and deliver block votes to political parties as if they are cash-and-carry sacks of rice. Some Muslim leaders have, for example, ordered their flocks to vote for Ken. Disgraceful, yes, but this is how it is on the Indian subcontinent and in Arab lands. A Muslim child is taught never to question and to follow instructions from adults, fathers, grandparents, teachers, mullahs and political manipulators. Respect for elders is admirable, but this excessive culture of obedience is stunting the development of Islamic communities.

<http://www.bmsd.org.uk/>

The real experiences of Muslim youth

Aims to raise awareness of the different social problems that affect young Muslims and provide culturally sensitive guidance to young people. The site encourages young Muslims to develop peer-support networks, access specialist services and care for their social and mental well-being. By profiling the real experiences of Muslim youth in a public forum, muslimyouth.net aims to confront the cultural stigma attached to common social issues such as mental health, drug abuse and sexuality. The forum and chat rooms will allow young Muslims to talk openly and anonymously about the issues that affect them without fear or community reprisal.

<http://www.muslimyouth.net/>