

Conference Report

Faith Schools: Consensus or Conflict

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THURSDAY 27 JUNE 2002

Opening Speech: Lord Dearing

Lord Dearing (C. of E.) gave an overview of the Dearing Report, published in June 2001. He reminded the audience that historically, education has been rooted in faith. The influence of the state has been increasingly felt since 1870. He raised the issues of what justifies faith schools and distinguishes them from others. He covered the arguments of spiritual/moral education provision; and parental wish. He commented that parents look to faith schools for their discipline, caring attitude and security of values. When discussing the academic achievement argument, he commented that GCSE results in faith schools are 12% higher than in non faith schools, which still made them more attractive, if not spectacularly so.

He stressed that recently, faith schools have been urged to be inclusive. They should respect people of other faiths and challenge those of no faith. Ultimately, the outcome of faith schools is measured by the quality of human beings they educate.

Faith Schools: Consensus or Conflict?

Keynote Speech by Professor Richard Pring (University of Oxford)

Richard Pring (Catholic) stated in his introduction that there was a paradox in the fact that 33% schools in the UK are faith schools when 45% people claim to have no faith. He reviewed the arguments for faith schools: higher academic standards, including in disadvantaged communities, although the NFER research qualifies this evidence; diversity; choice: the issue is rather what are the aims we seek to promote?; ethos/value system; equality of treatment, although this could easily be reversed and lead to the abolition of all faith schools; parents v. State, cf.. "Education is too important to be put in the hands of the State." Pring considers the argument of academic excellence

to be irrelevant to faith schools since they have other criteria for judging their effectiveness.

He then reviewed the arguments against faith schools: divisiveness, especially in today's context: he made the point here that the local community has no say in the schools admissions policy; hidden means of selection by creaming off the best students, thus creating problems for community schools; indoctrination; banning of faith schools: children have a right to be kept free of any indoctrination (humanist argument), should we ban schools of particular faiths and should we ban funding? There is the argument that there should be no public funding for practices that cannot be education-justified.

He urged us to review our educational philosophy.

1. *What are our educational aims?* Nurturing faith? Development of the mind? Promoting conversation between the generations of mankind? Presenting a religious view of the world (science and its limitations; belief v. evidence). We must remind ourselves that the aims of education rest on liberalism, with emphasis on the individual, rather than the community (limits to the "autonomy of the child" that is often put forward as an argument). We must not lose sight of the essential question: What is it to be human? Faith schools, in general, have a far clearer conception of this through the ethos which underpins and permeates their institution. This is probably the most powerful argument for their publicly-funded existence.

2. *Indoctrination:* This is difficult to situate. It refers to some "blocking off" people's learning, etc. It involves unquestioning belief without critically examining the evidence for it, and may include methodology and content of teaching as well as – crucially – the intentions of the teacher/educator. Faith schools introduce questioning, criticism through a particular tradition. It is vital to transmit this tradition. Pring referred to *Politics of Hope*, by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sachs where the latter discusses the transmission of education, knowledge, experience and says that if one cohort of parents fails to transmit this, then the whole chain is broken.

Parallel Papers

Faith School - The Spirit of the Community: Laurie Rosenberg (Simon Marks Jewish Primary School, London)

Rosenberg (Jewish) stressed the need for interfaith activities and community relations.

Different Leadership for Different Schools? Professor John Sullivan (Liverpool Hope University College)

Professor Sullivan (Catholic) suggested that, although there are difficulties that arise when faith schools emphasise their distinctiveness too much, so too there are dangers when insufficient attention is paid to this distinctiveness and when other professional and educational orthodoxies are imposed. He makes the case for tailor-made training for school leaders expected to provide a God-centred education. Current national leadership programmes such as the NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship) do not develop the transformative moral leadership required to lead faith schools. Hence the need for additional leadership training.

Perceptions of Success and the International Dimensions of Faith Schools, Professor James Arthur (Canterbury Christ Church University College, Kent)

In the light of evidence to the persistent and positive association between Catholic schooling and academic achievement that seems to be demonstrated on an international level, Professor Arthur (Catholic) calls for an international study of outcomes of catholic schooling to provide us with a better understanding of the reasons for higher levels of academic performance. Focus on academic success is not of itself evidence of achieving the goals of Catholic schooling.

Cautions and Contrasts, Professor Harry Judge (University of Oxford)

Professor Judge has just published *Faith-based Schools and the State*, a comparative study of the relationship between Catholic schools in America, France and England and the State. He argues that the contrasts are more illuminating than the analogies and that in each society the Church-State relationship is determined by specific cultural and historical factors. The evidence further suggests that the original “contracts” between the State and faith-based schools are subsequently varied in ways that could not be anticipated, and that their terms are often extended to other religious groups with unpredictable consequences. He concludes that it is now imprudent to extend further the complex relationships between government on the one hand and faith based schools on the other.

Moving on the Debate: A Research Agenda for Faith Schools

Replacing Prejudice with Evidence-based Argument: A Research Agenda for Faith-based Schooling, Professor Gerald Grace (Centre for Research and Development in Catholic Education Institute of Education)

Dr. Grace (Catholic) drove the point that unless faith schools invest in research to inform debate and policy, the vacuum will be filled by prejudice. Already, secular marginalisation dominates western contemporary intellectual culture and religion is ignored, ridiculed or attacked. He quoted Professor Richard Dawkins' unsubstantiated claim that religious schools "can be deeply damaging, even lethally divisive."

Although the Catholic schooling system is probably the largest faith-based provision internationally, involving about 120,000 Catholic schools serving almost 50 million students in a wide range of socio-economic, political and cultural setting worldwide, contemporary research offers partial images, with the USA providing the largest data source.

On religious, moral and social formation and attitudes, Greeley (1998), for instance, found that, as a consequence of post-Vatican II schooling, "those who attend Catholic schools are less prejudiced than Catholics who attend public schools and less prejudiced than all public school graduates. Moreover, they are also more likely to be pro-feminist. All these statements are true even when social class and educational achievement are held constant."

On educational service to the poor and disadvantaged, research shows clearly that not only achievement levels in these schools are higher than in the local public schools, but Catholic schooling in disadvantaged areas also meets the needs of the non-Catholic poor (In 8 major cities, ethnic minorities account for at least 70% school roll).

On contribution to the common good of society, research highlights the effect of the social justice mission of Vatican II. Dr. Grace noted that it is unlikely that the Catholic system is the only faith-based education mission that has such spiritual, moral and social justice purposes.

On school effectiveness and academic outcomes, numerous studies show that Catholic schools achieve better academic outcomes than comparable state schools. However, self-selection being an important factor with unmeasured implications, these results must be treated with caution. Researchers point to the positive effects of certain features of Catholic culture such as "social capital," "strong internal sense of community," "structured environments," "sense of mission," and "vocational commitment of teachers."

Dr. Grace argues that post-Vatican II Catholic schooling in England is entirely compatible with the principles of a liberal education and with the principles of a democratic and socially caring society. He also argues that "faith-based schools are one of the countervailing institutions against the

global hegemony of market materialism, individual competitiveness and commodity worship.”

Whilst there is an obvious need for systematic research into the spiritual, moral and intellectual cultures of faith-based schools and their educational and social outcomes, such research will need to be impartial, comprehensive and sensitive to the pluralist range of traditions and faith communities.

This means that research trusts, foundations and also government agencies must recognise that such research has become a mainstream need and is no longer a marginal activity. It also means that the authorities of the various faith communities must be prepared to open their schools to such impartial inquiry.

Dr. Grace suggested that research be carried out under the following headings: faith schools and community relations; faith schools and contribution to the common good; faith schools, markets and mission integrity; faith schools, liberal education and democratic culture; and faith schools: the views and experience of students

Dr. Ghazala Bhatti (University of Reading)

Dr. Bhatti (Muslim) reinforced this last point: listening to the children, who are too often under-represented in educational research.

Parallel Papers

Six Objections to Faith Schools: A Philosophical Examination, Professor Mark Halstead (University of Plymouth) and Terence McLaughlin (University of Cambridge)

Both professors have been working on a pamphlet entitled *In Defence of Faith Schools*, scheduled for publication in August 2002, as part of a series published by the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain addressed to policy makers and practitioners. They argue that these objections (i) divisiveness; ii) inadequacy with respect to the development of autonomy; iii) the common school as a preferable educational environment; iv) the need to limit parental rights; v) the danger of extremism and vi) the unjustifiability of public funding) are not decisive, especially when considered in relation to a number of arguments in favour of faith schools.

Through the Looking Glass: Religion, Identity and Citizenship in Plural Culture: The Role of Faith Schools, Lynndy Levin (Institute of Education, London)

Lynndy Levin (Jewish) argued that “as faith schools, the battle is ours to fight, both separately and collectively, but our aim is probably the same: to prevent the erosion of our faith and ethnicity by the liberal democratic state. In doing so, we affirm the human, legal and ethical rights of our pupils along the axes of justice, rights and responsibility; tradition, identity and effectiveness.”

FRIDAY 28 JUNE 2002

Faith Schools and Northern Ireland: A Review of Research

Professor Tony Gallagher (Queens University, Belfast)

Professor Gallagher gave a very thorough account of education in last 30 years in Northern Ireland, under three headings: The role of separate schools, the political conflict, and the peace process.

He highlighted the discriminatory measures against the Catholics until the mid 1980s. By 1964, most Irish pupils were taught in segregated schools. On the cultural level, the curriculum taught two different cultures, especially in History. On the social level, the mere fact of separation enhanced divisiveness. Facts pointed to inequality, not ignorance, as being a major factor, with heavy discrimination against the Catholics.

Action was taken over three decades, in the shape of curriculum interventions, contact programmes and the setting up of integrated schools. Until the early 1980s, this action was limited owing to a strategy of avoidance by some schools. With the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, political change led to more pro-activity. The 1990s promoted cultural pluralism, equality of opportunity (especially in the labour market), and the 1989 Reform Order provided a statutory curriculum and support for integrated education. A large budget was allocated to Community Relations and one third of the education budget was allocated to contact schemes.

The evaluation points to emphasis on poor quality contact work (50% schools were involved, but only 15% pupils), avoidance of difficult issues and, more positively, some education for democratic citizenship.

Integrated education was initiated by parents with external support and government support from the 1990s. It has achieved innovative practice and genuine integration. However, only 4% pupils are in integrated schools and there is a move to transform existing schools into integrated schools through parental vote.

After 3,164 deaths and 25 years of terror, the IRA ceasefire brought about inter-governmental cooperation, a politically inclusive process, a mechanism to promote consensus and an equality agenda (community schools have an assimilationist agenda).

In conclusion, the removal of separate schools will not remove the problem. Far more could and should be done.

Response

Jo Cairns (Institute of Education)

In her response, Jo Cairns highlighted the notion that schools tend to divide the children socially and that what is cruel is that we are not allowed to know other people's histories. She also shared with us her experience of Botswana where all schools are state-controlled (pupils and teachers have no choice in where they go) and the best school is a Catholic one. She also stressed the role of supplementary schools in some minority situations.

Parallel Papers

Faith Schools, a Jewish Perspective: Alastair Falk, Head of King Solomon High School, Redbridge.

Falk (Jewish) raised the issue of terminology, arguing that faith schools are really community schools and that the concept of faith schooling rests primarily on Catholic notions. Many Jewish schools could be seen as being multi-faith in the sense that they contain a vast variety of beliefs and commitments, all within the breadth of Jewish tradition. He argues that a truly multicultural society would allow for the development of schools that reflect various cultural and historical ethnicities, a variety that is obscured by the general label of "faith schooling."

What emerged in this session is that a large number of Jewish schools refer to Judaic teachings as "heritage" and that most Jewish children are considered to be assimilated into the host culture.

The Impact of Faith Schools on Pupil Performance: Drs Sandie and Ian Schagen, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

Based on national value-added datasets covering KS3 & 4, their research shows that Jewish schools are associated with enhanced pupil progress in most outcomes; Church schools tend to have above average results for English, but for other outcomes, their performance was not consistently distinguishable from that of non-faith schools.

Identity and Citizenship: The Role of Faith Schools: Dr. Muhammad Abdul Bari

Dr. Abdul Bari argued that faith schools have been instrumental in shaping education in Britain and have contributed to quality education for centuries. They have been instrumental in setting the moral and spiritual tone of the country and they have a great role to play in educating tolerant and responsible citizens. He called for all schools, especially faith ones, to be inclusive and open to their local community.

In Good Faith: A Critique of Religious Schools and Public Funding: Professor Marie Parker-Jenkins (University of Derby)

Professor Parker-Jenkins has spent a decade monitoring the development of faith schools, especially Muslim ones, here and abroad. She has found Muslim schools to have a much more open admissions policy than others. She found them to be very diverse and not at all divisive. She has found them to be achieving academically although lack of funding entails a restricted curriculum. She found that most Muslim schools do not want public funding because they do not want State control. On the citizenship debate, she raised the issue of loyalty as follows: When are you not loyal? Who decides?

Her study has revealed to her that the majority of arguments against faith schools do not stand up to her findings about Muslim schools.

Conclusion

The panel recapped on the main issues by highlighting the following:

- Parental choice v. child's choice (humanist argument)
- Faith schools do not have the monopoly of faith/religious education (humanist argument)
- What is the purpose of education?: we still need to address this question, especially in the context of multi-cultural Britain
- What is it to be a person/a good person?
- More research is needed, from all faith and non faith groups, into what makes the difference in a child's education; in particular, longitudinal studies seeking to evaluate the quality of persons schooled in faith schools or other schools.

Michèle Messoudi
Education Consultant
London, UK

Nasim Butt
Head of Science, King Fahd Academy
London, UK