

## **PRACTICAL STEPS OF DEVELOPING A CURRICULUM-THE ICE (ISLAM AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION) EXPERIENCE**

**MAURICE IRFAN CEO, THE COED FOUNDATION AND DIRECTOR OF THE ICE PROJECT, ENGLAND**

**PREAMBLE:** This brief paper attempts to provide the background to the ICE Project, analyses the key drivers and outlines some of the obstacles. It describes the outcomes in terms of the materials produced and made available. It unpacks the process undertaken to bring the project to a successful and well publicised conclusion. It concludes by itemising 10 key success factors that offer a series of practical steps for curriculum development.

### **THE BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT**

The ICE project was the brainchild of the English government's Department for Communities, Schools and Families (the DCSF), and came about as part of central government's response to the 7/7 atrocities in London. Government had funded a successful similar project in Bradford in the north of England which was based upon the work of the Local Council and the Bradford Council of Mosques. The NASIHA project was part citizenship and part Personal Social and Health Education. Its monitored success led the DCSF to let a new contract which originally targeted the teaching of citizenship in the country's estimated 4000 madrasahs who provide out of school hours teaching to Muslim young people from the ages of 4-16. The SDSA won the contract originally designed to be for one year. The aim was to produce a series of lessons that would be freely accessible to all.

There were three key obstacles that the project team had to overcome. The first was the huge suspicion of a government funded project that some vociferously argued was nothing short of a crude attempt by government to control Muslims. The second was the sectarian divisions both within the Sunni tradition and between the Shia and Sunni perspectives. The final obstacle was the underdeveloped collaboration between the various groups.

## **THE PROJECT OUTCOMES**

The project was, Alhamdulillah, a huge success, so much so that the original contract was extended to 18 months after which a new contract was issued for wider dissemination. In the first year the SDSA collaboratively produced 22 lessons for the teaching of citizenship for pupils aged 9-11, and 22 lessons for pupils aged 11-14. In addition the seminal article *When Hope and History Rhyme* provided the background, overview and Islamic justification. Finally a training video was produced. All these are available free and on-line but remain Crown Copyright under a creative commons license.

In the first year of the project, some 30 madrasahs in 6 regional clusters came on board each receiving a small bursary. 6 coordinators were appointed to manage their regions, provided feedback and evaluation from the pupils, the parents and the teachers. All teachers involved received one day training provided by the core team.

Following these almost 400 madrasahs adopted the materials, each one receiving a small bursary on completion of half of the lessons with evaluations. These lessons were also adapted so that they might be used by secular schools with a large number of Muslim pupils. Subsequently the materials have spread to the Balkan regions, Romania and parts of Western Europe

## **THE PROJECT PROCESSES**

The processes undertaken were key to its success: collaboration, listening, and amending were the hallmarks. The core team were able to recruit some senior ulama from all fiqh, both Sunni and Shia to advise at all stages and finally to validate the materials. Debates were robust and discourse was Islamic. Both genders were represented but attempts to involve young people were frustrating because of their time constraints.

The original materials were devised by a small working group, polished by the core team, discussed with the coordinators who then transmitted them to their madrasahs who were encouraged but not required to follow the schemes of work outlined. Similarly they were encouraged to substitute hadith or

Quarnic references if it suited. Evaluations were a requirement and at the end of each lesson pupils were asked what they had learnt as Muslims. All evaluations were forwarded to the core team for analysis and a number of recommendations taken on board.

Throughout the materials developed were based upon the English national curriculum format of a three part lesson with which the pupils were familiar. Similarly, the citizenship themes were drawn from the English national curriculum and then Islamised making the content both Islamic and contemporary. Evaluations were wonderfully positive and the final word remains with one student who felt that *'the teaching of citizenship was better in his madrasah than in his school.'*

### **THE 10 KEY SUCCESS FACTORS THAT OFFER SOME PRACTICAL STEPS**

There are 10 key learning points which may help in the development of curriculum. There is no hierarchical order in the list:

- 1) *Clarity of intended outcomes:* we were very clear what we hoped to achieve but we articulated this with our advisory board. For us, a holistic approach uniting madrasahs and mainstream schools was fundamental. Each lesson had explicit aims and a common format
- 2) *The core team of personnel and wider support :* the SDSA core team of three, the six area coordinators who undertook the trails, and the writing team all had a very clear brief and all supported each other
- 3) *The approach to curriculum development:* Inclusivity was our keynote throughout. Once produced everybody involved was asked to reflect with a critical eye. Discourse was encouraged and even when very critical, was welcomed in a spirit of openness
- 4) *The training of the teachers:* the best materials in the world can be ruined by inexperienced teachers. The training package offered them a unique opportunity to comment at an early stage and to be taught the practical steps
- 5) *The trials:* every lesson, every aspect, every Quranic verse and hadith were trailed and tested by all 30 madrasahs and feedback collated

- 6) *The money:* was an undoubted help. It acted as an unabashed sweetener to bring groups on-board-a powerful incentive in a world of deficit budgets!
- 7) *The evaluations:* were a painstaking prerequisite of any payment. Of most value were the pupil evaluations because they got to the Islamic heart of the matter
- 8) *The advisory board:* the range of ulama gave the project both credibility and a number of critical friends
- 9) *The validation board:* this 2 day event went through every lesson with a sharply critical eye-some scholars with no other income were paid for their time
- 10) *The relevance of the materials:* from project outset we insisted that we were aiming to teach Islamic values through the medium of citizenship. Pupils were generous in their appraisal of the contemporary relevance because the materials allowed them to see the relevance of their Islamic faith in an often hostile world.

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout we were mindful of the possible international usage of the materials, hence their free availability. The lessons were designed so that with a little tweaking any country could amend the materials to suit their needs whilst retaining the core messages. Insha'Allah, this appears to have worked.