Sparks in the Classroom

Creativity in Philosophy and Religious Studies

Newington College
Religious Education has no place in a modern curriculum.

Do you agree? Why or why not?
‘More than half of secondary school pupils now choose Religious Education as a GCSE subject, and for two consecutive years it’s been the fastest growing subject at AS level (G. Haig, The Guardian Newspaper, 12/12/06)

‘The relentless growth of Religious Education as a choice for GCSE students underlines the importance of investing adequate resources and time in its teaching. Young people are clamouring for a deeper understanding of religious perspectives on issues of the day and how moral and ethical questions are considered by the major faiths ... Twelve years of organic growth in student numbers cannot be ignored.’ (N. McKemey, Church of England Newspaper, 24/8/10)
Dear Teacher,

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.

PRS explores different responses to the question of what it means to be human (i.e., different ‘world-views’).
'RE is concerned with ultimate values – specifically the significance of the human individual in the cosmos. What is a person? What is our perception of the worth of the individual based on? With what ends in view should a person live?’ (Brian V. Hill, *Exploring Religion in School*, p.45)

‘RE ... doesn’t merely involve the transmission of an inherited body of content... It is an attempt to persuade students to think through basic questions of personal meaning and to examine their own life purposes.’ (Ibid., p.56)
Philosophy and Religious Studies

- ‘Non-confessional’
- Starts from questions / concepts / philosophical themes
  - a ‘personal search’ approach (*Kirkwood*)
- An exploration of worldviews, religious and non-religious
- **Building literacy** (including ‘religious literacy’ – *Wright*)
- Inter-disciplinary
- **Emphasis on critical and creative thinking**
- Emotional intelligence
- **Enquiry-based**
- Activity-centred
The Nature of the Subject

1. A descriptive examination of religions and their phenomena (largely the approach advocated by the Toledo Report).
2. As a vehicle to promote personal search (e.g., Robert Kirkwood)
3. As the critical examination of truth claims in religion and ethics (e.g., Andrew Wright)
4. As a post-modern vehicle for constructing your own meaning in life (e.g., Clive Erricker)
5. Confessional / catechetical – faith formation within a particular religious tradition

These aims need not be mutually exclusive.
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‘Personal Search’

Begins with issues and themes with which students can identify – What is a good life? Are science and religion compatible? Can I prove the existence of God? Why is there suffering in the world? What do we mean by ‘right’ and ‘wrong’?

Explores religious and non-religious responses to these questions

Draw insights from philosophy, psychology, literature, film and popular culture

Creating a relationship between the content of PRS and the personal existential concerns of students
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World Views

‘A world view is a set of assumptions which we hold about the basic make-up of our world’ (James Sire)

Scientism, Relativism, Materialism, Consumerism, Utilitarianism ... theism, Buddhism ...

The implications of such world-views. Students become more critically aware of the values that surround them and see the possibility of learning from other visions of reality.
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The PRS Curriculum – A Basic Overview

**Year 7** – Me, You and the Universe
Who am I? (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual); Myself and others; Myself and the universe (ultimate questions and concepts of God)

**Year 8** – Arguments about the existence of God; Science and Religion: Allies or Enemies?

**Year 9** – What is a good life? The Philosophy of Happiness; Evil, Suffering and Religion

**Year 10** – Ethics in the 21st Century (Introduction to ethical theory and applied ethics); Critical Thinking

Elective courses: Year 8 Philosophy; IB Philosophy; HSC Studies of Religion
Centre for Ethics

The Centre for Ethics at Newington College is a forum for students, teachers, parents and the wider community, to engage in discussion of contemporary moral issues, beliefs and values.

Through its public lectures, workshops and conferences, the Centre aims to promote critical and creative thinking, inter-cultural understanding and serious engagement with the moral issues facing young Australians in the 21st century.
Year 8 Philosophy & Religious Studies

• Introduction to Critical Thinking

• Unit 1
  Arguments about the Existence of God
  Aquinas, Paley, Feuerbach, Pascal

• Unit 2
  Science & Religion: Allies or Enemies?
The team that is more entertaining is the better team and

England is more entertaining to watch than Australia

therefore

England is a better team than Australia
1: Everything in the universe has a cause
2: There must be a first cause
3: The first cause must be uncaused
C: This ‘First Cause’ must be God
1. Which of the objects in the above boxes do you think have been designed?

What’s in the mystery box?

See Jones, Cardinal & Hayward, *Philosophy of Religion* (Hodder Murray, 2005), p.66
Feuerbach: God is a projection of the mind
Religious fundamentalism
the belief that religion offers SUFFICIENT explanations for the universe

Scientific fundamentalism
the belief that science offers SUFFICIENT explanations for the universe
Why did the chicken cross the road?

1. To get to the other side
2. Because it was stapled to the hedgehog
3. Because there were a series of muscular contractions and relaxations acting as a system of hinged bony joints
4. To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction
5. Because it felt like it!
6. I don’t know
7. Because it was Wednesday
8. Because the farmer showed it some food
9. Because it is part of God’s plan

a. Theological
b. Biological
c. Human decision
d. Unknown
e. Physics
f. Instinctive
g. No choice
h. Chicken’s choice
Word Game

Rules:

You cannot say:
• any of the words / parts of words on the card
• ‘Sounds like’, ‘rhymes with’, etc.

You cannot:
• mime, point, or use any non-verbal communication
The story of King Midas
Myth as untruth

Myth as vehicle for truth
The Babylonian Creation Myth:
The Enûma Eliš

I will take blood
And fashion bone;
I will establish a savage;
‘Man’ shall be his name,
Truly savage-man I will create!
He shall be charged with the service of the gods,
That they might be at ease!
Chapter 1

In the beginning God created heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Enuma Elish

Humans are made to serve God (the gods).
Humans are savage.
The Creator is a warrior.
The Creator makes a city for himself.
The Creator rules with the agreement of others.
The creatures of the sea are evil.
There are many gods (polytheism).
Good and evil forces are equal and battle each other for supremacy (dualism).
Humans are created as a result of the destruction of something else.
It is clear that matter existed before the act of Creation.
Creation is a result of destruction.

Both

The Creator gives names to what is created.
God/Gods existed before Creation.
The Creator gives order to the universe.

Genesis I

All of humankind has authority over, and responsibility for, the rest of Creation.
Everything in Creation is good when it is made.
The Creator acts alone.
The creatures of the sea are good.
The existence of matter before the act of Creation is ambiguous.
Humans are essentially good.
Creation is a result of the positive action of a Creator.
Humans are the last to be created.
The Creator is eternal.
“The Genesis story simply holds up a mirror to life, so that we can see ourselves in it.”

Humans are special because they have a spiritual nature.

Freedom without law is not possible.

Humans have a special responsibility to care for the environment.

There is one God: all powerful, loving and the source of all life.

Human suffering is a result of the desire for power.

Humans should not ‘go it alone’ in life, independently of God.
I enjoyed the ability to openly look at questions from multiple stand points and pick apart these different points of view.

I enjoyed debating the idea of the universe being created. All the ideas from different philosophers were engaging and I found the arguments fascinating.

I love the fact that we get to learn about something not many people get to in life.

The main skill that I have developed is looking at things in different ways. For example, looking at the universe being created by a God from a Christian’s point of view, an atheist point of view and also the Jewish view. All of the sides had arguments that kept me wanting to know more.
Year 9 PRS: what is a good life?

Themes

1. Happiness-seeking missiles?
2. Divided selves
3. Pleasure
4. Materialism
5. Positive psychology
6. Buddhism
7. Christianity
Endgame

• I go to school in order to... X

• I X in order to... Y

• I Y in order to...

From ‘Exploring Ethics’: Activity-centred teaching to develop thinking about values, by Jeremy Hayward, Gerald Jones, Marilyn Mason. Published by Hodder in 2000 ISBN 9780719571817

Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim of human existence.
Aristotle
Happiness-seeking missiles

Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim of human existence. Aristotle
Jump forwards/backwards

When you see the following pictures either jump forwards (for ones that are pleasant) or backwards (for ones that are unpleasant).
Marking!!!
Jump forwards/backwards

When you see the following pictures either jump forwards (for ones that are unpleasant) or backwards (for ones that are pleasant).
LOOK AT THE LEFT LEG!!!
Divided selves
### Happiness in different activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Average happiness</th>
<th>Average hours a day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialising</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxing</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praying/worshipping/meditating</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercising</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing food</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking on the phone</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking care of my children</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer/email/Internet</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuting</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: More than one type of activity is possible at any one time.

### Happiness while interacting with different people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interacting with</th>
<th>Average happiness</th>
<th>Average hours a day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse/partner</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My children</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients/customers</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-workers</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boss</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: More than one type of activity or type of company is possible at any one time.
Materialism
Adaptation + Social Comparison = Hedonic treadmill
Activity

1. Keep the images to yourself.
2. Look at your own images and rate each one /10 according to how satisfied you would be if it were yours.
3. Then compare with others in the group.
4. Re rate any of your images having seen what others have got.

When you hear the countdown music you have 30 seconds to wrap up.
Insights from positive psychology

- Identify signature character strengths at: www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu
- and find ways of playing to them and blogging/journaling about it.
- Three good things: Each evening for a week, write down three good things from that day.
- Gratitude visit: Write a letter to someone who has made a significantly positive contribution to your life. Then arrange to visit them and read it to them.
What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind. If we speak or act with an impure mind, suffering follows us as the wheel of the cart follows the ox... If we speak or act with a pure mind, joy follows us like our own shadow.

The Dhammapada 1:1-2
The human condition

The goal

The means

The Eight-Fold Path
Mindfulness activities

- Attending the Senses: The raisin (or strawberry etc.) meditation.

- Awareness of an Object: Draw an object. Then study the object carefully for two minutes. Draw it again. Compare the two drawings.
Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 John 4: 7
The human condition

"Our Hearts are Restless Until They Rest in You"
From the Confessions
Saint Augustine of Hippo
Works Cited


Catherine Syms, ‘Enhancing the Effectiveness of Religion and Values Education within ISNZ Schools: Rationale, Purpose and Practice’ (Heads of Independent Schools Scholarship Trust Research Project 2010/2011)