

Who Am I? sprang out of an event held at the Friends' Meeting House in Reading as part of Inter-faith Week 2010. It was such a success that we wished we had filmed it - hence the replication at Slough Grammar School. Eleanor Nesbitt gave her opening talk to an audience of over 200 people which included the Slough Grammar sixth form, students from Maidenhead, adults from Inter-faith groups in High Wycombe, Maidenhead and Reading, and members of the Oxford Diocesan Committee for Inter-faith Concerns (ODCIC), who sponsored the project. The discussion groups comprised some 60 people from the audience at the opening lecture.

The importance of *Who Am I?* stems from the framework created by Eleanor Nesbitt and from the quality of the discussions with the students. The quality of the students' responses and their willingness to respect the points of view of others is a credit to the School and a model of effective dialogue between those of different religious traditions. This has implications for the teaching of RE in schools, the encouragement of dialogue between faith groups and reflection within faith communities.

Much of Eleanor Nesbitt's research has been into the religious identity of young people. Her publications include: *Interfaith Pilgrims: Living Truths and Truthful Living* (Swarthmore Lecture, Quaker Books 2003), *Sikhism: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP 2005) and, with Robert Jackson, *Hindu Children in Britain* (Trentham Books 1993), *Intercultural Education: Ethnographic and Religious Approaches* (Sussex Academic 2004).

Our thanks go to The Baines Trust and to South East England Faiths Forum (SEEFF) for their generous grants, support and encouragement. Thanks to Slough Grammar School and in particular to Stella Neal, Head of Philosophy, Critical Thinking and Religious Studies, who worked tirelessly to organise an event at which students felt able to share their very personal feelings about their religious identity. The DVDs were created and edited by David Sparrow, Creative Lead at Art Beyond Belief.



challenging preconceptions
www.art-beyond-belief.com

The Baynes Foundation

Slough Grammar School



The Oxford Diocesan Committee for Inter-faith Concerns



Serving Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire

Who Am I ?

The *Who Am I?* set is divided between two DVDs, - *The Event* (1 hr 4 mins) and *The Group Discussions* (1hr 29mins)

These two DVDs are the product of a day conference held at Slough Grammar School in September 2011. The first DVD - *The Event* - focuses on the opening talk given by Dr Eleanor Nesbitt, Professor Emerita of Religions and Education, University of Warwick, and raises a number of issues to do with the religious identity of young people. The second DVD - *Group Discussions* - draws on the comments made by those attending the conference and is arranged in 'chapters' according to the main themes suggested by Eleanor Nesbitt.

How to use the DVDs

There are two Guides to using this material, both of which can be found on the *Group Discussions* DVD

The Quick Guide (6 mins) emphasises the need for a leader or facilitator to look at all the material on both DVDs before using it in a group or class setting. In particular, leaders need to look at the whole of Eleanor Nesbitt's talk and to all the Group Discussions before deciding where best to begin. The material is intended as a starting point for discussion rather than as offering any particular guidance or answers. It can be used in Inter-faith groups, single faith communities and in schools and colleges. Above all it is a model for effective Inter-faith dialogue as it shows students talking and listening to each other and sometimes disagreeing in a respectful and constructive manner. As Stella Neal says, "... the students are not moving away from their faith; rather they are moving forward into something new where they are adapting their faith within the context of modern British society."

The Education Guide (15 mins) contains much that is in the Quick Guide but with added material referring to specific contexts such as sixth forms, primary schools and classes lower down the secondary schools, interfaith groups and single faith communities. You can choose whichever section is most appropriate for your purposes.

These notes and the questions are also available to download and print when The Event DVD is inserted into a computer.

The Event DVD

The Event DVD has five sections of very different lengths:

- Titles
- Introduction by Dr Hugh Boulter, Secretary to ODCIC and welcome by the Head Boy and Head Girl of Slough Grammar School. (8 mins)
- Eleanor Nesbitt's talk *Who Am I? Religious Identity and Young People* (30 mins)
- Two questions on faith schools and on identity and culture (6 mins)
- A selection of student comments taken from the plenary session at the end of the day (20 mins)

Eleanor Nesbitt's talk centred around a series of twelve questions which she posed to the audience, and a list of six further factors which are likely to influence their responses. The twelve questions are:

- 1 How many identities do I have?
- 2 Is religion central to my identity?
- 3 How important is language to my identity?
- 4 What situations bring out different aspects of my identity?
- 5 Do my parents feel the same about religious identity as I do?
- 6 Do I separate religion out from culture more than they do?
- 7 Are some people more Muslim/Christian/Sikh than I am?
- 8 How important is place – as someone from Slough? from the UK? from the Punjab? from Serbia? from Somalia? etc
- 9 What has changed my sense of who I am? School? RE? Being in a majority or minority?
- 10 What affects how I describe myself to someone else? (how they speak or look?)
- 11 Do I ever feel pulled between different identities?
- 12 Is dress important to my religious identity?

The six factors which may impinge on the answers are:

My Community's Culture; My Religion's Teaching; Modernity; Gender; Age (Generation); Class or Caste.

The final section of this DVD consists of comments in the plenary session. They are useful for giving an overview of the points made by students within the different groups and in particular about their perception that in holding to their faith and coming to terms with the culture of modern British society they have become more mature and better rounded people.

The Group Discussions DVD

The Group Discussions DVD consists of eight 'chapters' which are in no particular order. Begin where you want, although it is probably sensible to look at the whole menu before deciding where to start. In addition there is a section about how to get the best out of the DVDs.

Chapter 1 What effect does your dress have on your religious identity?

Chapter 2 Multiple identities: How many identities do you have? Which of these is most important for you? Is religion a central part of your identity?

Chapter 3 Language Identity: Which languages do you speak? Do they reinforce your religious identity? (includes issues about translation of sacred texts into English)

Chapter 4 Situational Identity – Identity and others: Which situations bring out different aspects of your identity? What affects how you describe yourself to other people?

Chapter 5 Identity conflict – Change and Identity: Do you ever feel that you are pulled between two (or more) identities? What has changed your sense of who you are? (includes discussion about the uniqueness of different religions)

Chapter 6 Parents, Religion and Culture: Do your parents feel the same way about religious identity as you do? Do you think that you separate out religion and culture more than your older relatives do? (includes arranged marriages and Inter-faith marriages)

Chapter 7 Intention, Caste, Identity and School: Is a person's intention important? Is caste important? Has your experience of school influenced your sense of identity?

Chapter 8 Place and identity: How important are places to who you feel you are? (includes pilgrimages)

These group discussion questions are available in slide form from the main menu of the *Group Discussions* DVD.