

LASAR newsletter No. 6 (February 2012)

Dear Reader,

The LASAR project team is now embarking on the third and final year of data gathering to discover pupils' and teachers' views about the relationships between science and religion.

Through interviews and questionnaires in schools spread across England, the project is gathering what promises to be an incredible insight into pupils' perceptions and attitudes within the secondary school context.

Findings thus far will be presented at the LASAR conference we are holding in May in Cambridge:

**CREATIVITY, CREATION AND A BIG BANG:
Science and Religion in the school curriculum
Sat 19th May 2012 at St. Edmund's College Cambridge**

This is the second, one-day conference we have organised and will also focus on demonstrating resources to help with the teaching and learning of science and religion. For details of speakers and for conference registration (£20 including lunch, £15 trainees/HE students) please visit the conference page of The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion at www.faraday-institute.org

Website news

Our free resources website has expanded and now includes further pages for older pupils as we have been developing sections for Years 10-11 and Years 12-13 (within both the RE and the HSW pages).

We have been focusing on increasing the website's profile – and currently have links to the project on the RE Today and NATRE (The National Association of Teachers of RE) websites and the ASE (Association for Science Education) website.

You may also have spotted our ad in The Times Educational Supplement on 13th January 2012!

If you or your pupils have been using the website, www.FaradaySchools.com and feel as enthusiastic about it as we do, we would love to hear from you! We are inviting short website reviews from pupils and teachers (or we can email a

mini-survey for pupils to complete). Please email Helen about this: h.s.newdick@reading.ac.uk.

The pdf sent with this email gives a flavour of the material available on the Yr10-11 Science pages, with a screen grab from the website about Darwin and the first page of the session plans that link with web content on the theory of evolution.

Research progress

Information about the project has been presented at two recent conferences:

In November we presented at the UCET Annual Conference in Leicestershire: 'Answering questions about science & religion: what trainee teachers might like to know.' And in January we presented at the ASE Annual Conference at the University of Liverpool: 'Science, God or both? Answering pupils' questions about science and religion.'

We have also had a recent paper published in, 'Teacher Education', Vol. 62, 2011, pages 16-29. The paper is entitled *Teaching and learning about the relationships between science and religion*.

For news of our research visit www.lasarpj.com (We post presentations, conference papers and our newsletters there.)

Background about the project

The LASAR, Learning about Science and Religion, Project was motivated by a concern that there is a strong public perception (reinforced by some popular media) that science and religion are in some sense opposites, that is that science is an atheistic activity. In particular, we were concerned that school pupils may come to accept this as a normative standard: something that is both incorrect, and which could deter students who hold religious faith from considering science as a suitable basis of future study and career. Such an effect would not only be unfortunate when there is widespread concern about the limited numbers of young people seriously considering science careers, but in principle could set up a self-fulfilling prophecy. If people of faith are significantly deterred from science, then science could over time become dominated by atheists!

LASAR is looking at this issue from two complementary directions. We are planning research which will help us find out more about exactly what secondary age students do think about science and religion, something of the factors which they feel influence their views, and how their ideas shift over time. We intend to report our findings widely, and when we have results available we will use this newsletter to direct readers to these reports. We are also looking to develop curriculum materials and approaches which can support teachers in engaging secondary age pupils with something of the broad range of opinions and scholarship in the area of science and religion. In this way we hope to make sure that there are sufficient accessible and balanced presentations to help pupils to recognise that this is a nuanced area where there are no simple answers (so scientists hold a wide range of faith positions and views on religious matters), and offer them interesting resources to stimulate their own thinking in this area.

Yours with best wishes

Berry, Keith, Fran and Helen

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