

Curriculum Models: Collaborative Learning in RE

There are many ways in which successful religious education can be included in the curriculum. Some are listed below. But take care! Creative approaches to the curriculum can easily obscure children's progress in the subject disciplines. Whichever method of 'delivery' is chosen, teachers will need to ask themselves, 'Can I identify the *specific RE* activities?' And 'Will I be able to give the pupils feedback on how well they have progressed in their RE learning?'

Here are five examples of how RE might contribute to different models of 'creative curricula':

1. **RE-led whole days:** Using a key question from the agreed syllabus, e.g., 'How should we live and who can inspire us?' Or topics such as: Faith in the local community; A faith trail; Religion, stewardship and the environment; Being an "x" in Britain today; Variety and diversity within a tradition; Science and Religion.
2. **RE contribution to 'crashed timetable' days:** Using RE-friendly themes such as, 'Who Are We?'; 'The Journey of Life'; 'Planet Earth'; 'Diversity and Difference'.
3. **RE-led Research & Presentation Weeks:** For example, a Focus Week on *BELIEF, PEACE, or DIVERSITY*.
4. **Skills or competencies-led:** Lead pupils' learning, e.g., by focusing first on Personal, Emotional, Learning and Thinking Skills (PELTS) or by other school-based competencies. Set the skills development in an RE context by making use of the key and subsidiary questions in the AMV programmes of study.

a) Personal and Emotional Skills

Focus: Pupils take responsibility for their own learning and show initiative, perseverance and a commitment to self-improvement. They recognise that achievement builds self-confidence and resilience, enabling them to deal positively with praise and constructive criticism.

Pupils learn how to:

- i) identify their strengths and areas for development, reflecting on the significance of their learning;
- ii) manage their feelings using appropriate strategies, becoming increasingly aware of their own and others' feelings;
- iii) reflect on past achievements and experiences to manage future learning and behaviour;
- iv) set goals for their personal development and learning, and work towards them;
- v) work independently, knowing when to seek help, dealing with pressures and deadlines;
- vi) develop control over their physical skills and movements in a range of contexts with dexterity and confidence.

b) Learning and Thinking Skills

Focus: Pupils have the skills to learn effectively. They can plan, research and critically evaluate, using reasoned arguments to support conclusions. They think creatively, making original connections and generating ideas. They consider alternative solutions to problems.

Together with the essential literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, pupils learn how to:

- i) investigate, asking relevant questions, identifying problems, analysing and judging the value of information and ideas, questioning assumptions. They plan systematically using time and resources effectively, anticipating, taking and managing risks;

ii) create and develop, using their imagination to explore possibilities and generate ideas. They try out innovative alternatives, looking for patterns, recognising differences and making generalisations, predicting outcomes and making reasoned decisions;

iii) communicate, interacting with different audiences in a variety of ways using a range of media;

iv) evaluate, developing criteria for judging work and suggesting refinements and improvements.

5. RE contribution to termly topics:

Ensure that topics are suitable for RE input - see tables below.

Linking 'Topics' to Key RE Questions: Foundation Stage & Key Stage 1

Sample Topics	Key RE Question
Ourselves / Who Are We?	Who are we?
Toys / Gifts / Celebrations	Why are some times special?
Stories	Why are some stories special?
Our Neighbourhood / Diversity	Where do we belong?
Yesterdays / The Journey of life/ Adventure	How do we celebrate our journey through life?
Materials / Material and Spiritual / How Green Can You Grow?	How should we live our lives?
The Seaside / Special Places / Our Town	Why are some places special?
Creatures / Mini-Beasts / Planet Earth / All Creatures Great & Small	Why is our world special?
Light / Superheroes / Light & Enlightenment	Why is Jesus important?

Linking 'Topics' to Key RE Questions: Key Stage 2

Sample Topics	Key RE Question
Ourselves / Golden Oldies	What is important to me?
Celebrations / The Olympics / Happiness & Success / 'Veni Vidi Vici'	What can we learn from the life and teaching of Jesus?
Transport / Technology / Communications / 'www.'	Why do religious books and teachings matter?
Victorians / Vikings / Romans / Invaders & Settlers / Yesterdays / Local Studies / Peoples Past and Present	What does it mean to belong to a religion? Christianity
Growth / Power / Forces for Change/ Adventure	Why are some journeys and places special?
Fair Trade / Shop Till You Drop / Choices	How do we make moral choices?
Express Yourself / A Material World / 'Power to the People'	How do people express their beliefs and identity?
Water / The Circle of Life / Planet Earth	What do people believe about life?
Exploration / Around the World / Inspirations	How should we live and who can inspire us?
Local Studies / Homes / India / That's Life / (Ancient) Civilizations / Communities	What does it mean to belong to a religion? Hinduism

Local Studies / Homes / Africa / Egyptians / Civilizations/ Communities	What does it mean to belong to a religion? Islam
Local Studies / Homes / Egyptians / Civilizations/ Communities	What does it mean to belong to a religion? Judaism

Linking 'Topics' to Key RE Questions: Key Stage 3

Sample Topics	Key RE Question
Ourselves / Being Human	What experiences and beliefs are important to me and to others?
Planet Earth / Living Beings	Does our planet have a future?
Material and spiritual	Where are the answers to life's big questions?
Local Studies / Communities / Our Neighbourhood	What can we learn from religions, beliefs and communities living today?
Journeys / Time / Pilgrimage / Change	How are religions and beliefs portrayed in the media?
Local Studies / Communities / Our Neighbourhood	How might beliefs affect my thoughts, ideas and actions?
Diversity and difference	How do people best express their beliefs and identities?
Planet Earth / Origins	What do people believe about life and the place of religions and beliefs within it?
The Olympics / Healthy Living	What's to be done? What really matters in religion and beliefs?

Collaborative Learning

In all RE planning, but especially where you feel it is a good idea to join the learning with other curriculum subjects, it will be important to address three questions, namely:

1. **What are you trying to achieve?**
2. **How will you organise learning to achieve your aims?**
3. **How well have you achieved your aims?**

Question 1. What are you trying to achieve?

At the start of any worthwhile innovation is the vision of what might be achieved. In RE, certainly, your vision must deal with life's qualities, much more than its quantities. The fundamental question is: *What differences do you want to see in your learners?*

In other words, what do you hope they will be able to do and what will they know and understand, when they have undertaken the programme of study you have organised for them? There may be many obstacles in the way, of course, but without that vision you may not have the drive to reach towards it.

Question 2. How will you organise learning to achieve your aims?

In order to engage and motivate pupils many schools have set up 'pupil-voice' groups to enable them to develop their own questions for investigation. It is good, when planning any collaborative sequence of

learning, to take pupils' views into account. This may include making use of preferred learning styles but sometimes it is useful to challenge pupils to make progress in other ways too.

It will be necessary to consider what changes to the *timetable* may be required, in order for proposed changes to take place. For example, where cross-curricular projects are concerned, whether it would be best to provide blocks of time for extended project work, or for teachers to provide specialist input at certain points.

All staff involved in teaching or leading the collaborative learning sequence need to be *involved in the planning process*, ensuring aims are clear and that all will be able to provide the right focus for the pupils' learning. From an RE point of view, when collaborating with other subject areas, maintain a distinct RE contribution.

Pupils should be involved at all points of the development of the project. They can then express their views on what the goals of a project might be, how they might best go about finding the information they need and how they will work out their own questions for the investigation.

Once you have decided what you are trying to achieve, one way of managing collaborative learning that has proved effective, is to work out a key questions that fits the contributing subject areas and to build the planning around one of the **cross-curricular dimensions**. These are:

- Identity and cultural diversity
- Healthy lifestyles
- Community participation
- Enterprise
- Global dimension and sustainable development
- Technology and the media
- Creativity and critical thinking

The following diagram illustrates the planning process:



As a crucial part of the planning, it will be important to consider a variety of possible means by which pupils can express their ideas and findings. You might like to give pupils a choice from the following lists:

Means of communication

Oral	Written	Visual
Presentation	Academic article	PowerPoint - picture/photo selection
Lecture	Report	Documentary film: Movie-maker
Debate	Letter/email	Web pages
'Panel' discussion	Review	Exhibition gallery
Interview	Short biography	Museum / gallery / site guide
Tour guide / audio presentation	Fictional story	Souvenir
Radio documentary	Web debate	Model
Podcast	Text book spread	Film/stage set

Movie-maker commentary	Poem/song/rap	Board game
Peer work reviews	Blog	Interactive display
Exhibition commentary	Web site text	Multi-media storyboard
Speech to virtual character or audience	Trailers for movies / TV religion series	Graphic novel

Question 3. How well have you achieved your aims?

Teachers and pupils can together reflect upon and evaluate the impact of the learning on pupils' *attitudes and behaviour*. Have pupils, for example, been willing to learn from others, even when others' views might be different from their own? Have they become more sensitive to the impact of their ideas and behaviour on other people? Observations of such changes can be recorded through peer and teacher records.