

Module 1- Activity 3: How do we teach RE?

I watched the NATRE Good learning video on Enquiring into Worship from Broxbourne C of E Primary School. The lesson was aimed at helping the children to understand what the Christian community does and believes in the light of Bible teaching, and the teacher had planned the lesson using enquiry based and open learning opportunities.

What was apparent was that the children were engaged and motivated throughout the lesson and were clearly enjoying the varied active learning opportunities on offer. They were first asked to memorise parts of the picture, which encouraged them to look closely for the clues and begin to build a picture of Christian worship. During the next part of the lesson the children were asked to develop their own questions about each picture for another group to answer, for example: What are they singing? What are they thinking about? This really put them in the driving seat of their learning. They worked effectively in teams to do this, developing speaking, listening and communication skills as they worked.

Their investigative skills continued as the children worked together to answer the questions. This required some previous knowledge about Christian worship. However, the teacher had obviously planned the lesson taking into account the prior knowledge of the children and context of the school and its community.

In the final part of the lesson the children were linking key bible passages to the pictures of Christian worship, this helped the children to make connections between Christian belief and practice. Within this activity the children were able to reflect on their own ideas and beliefs about what makes a good community life (human development pedagogy).

The teaching approaches used in this lesson were in sharp contrast to the phenomenology approach of teaching facts and knowledge, where pupils passively receive information. Whilst some children are like 'sponges' absorbing facts and knowledge and enjoy learning in this way, others will simply get lost with the amount of information and switch off. Enquiry based learning opportunities have the potential to involve all learners of all abilities so that every child can make progress within the lesson. The children worked in mixed ability groups, and in that way they were able to learn from each other. The use of effective questioning is key to extending learner's thinking, the teacher could have used more probing questions during the discussion time in this lesson to make sure that the children really grasped some of the key ideas in the biblical materials.

Whilst there are many advantages to an enquiry based approach, it may not work in every classroom. It works successfully in classrooms where children are able to work in teams effectively so that everyone participates. This may take some practice!

I enjoyed watching the video and I would use the same pedagogical approaches and activities in my classroom. Learning that is driven and owned by pupils helps them to develop the higher order thinking skills that they need to become a self-motivated, life-long learner. I feel strongly that pupils should be given opportunities to reflect, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate during their learning, and in this way RE teaching contributes to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the child.