

Religious Education university & school collaboration

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1. Foundation subject specialisms

At the University of Gloucestershire, student teachers select one foundation subject specialism beyond the generalist input in all subjects. The specialist modules combine university based input with embedded subject focused school work. This poster includes quotations from BEd primary religious education (RE) specialists which highlight the benefits of this blended model.

2. Exploring then applying good practice

The aim of the specialism is to equip trainees to be able to apply the following principles of highly effective pedagogy in school to promote child-led enquiry and deeper understanding of believers' lived experiences:

- Interrogate sacred texts, stories, artefacts and images, handing the intellectual thinking over to the children, with the support of the teacher's subject knowledge
- Incrementally develop children's knowledge of a religion before expecting them to become curious about the impact beliefs have on people's lives
- Enable the children to raise 'big questions' in an inclusive, respectful climate where pupils can 'disagree agreeably'
- Make use of people of faith to share how having a faith impacts on their lives
- Provide opportunities for children to connect ideas explored with their own lives

Interactive, dialogic seminars explore how to enact these principles through use of visitors and persona dolls who bring artefacts into the classroom (Figure 1), utilising Godly play, incorporating visits to local places of worship and modelling inter-faith dialogue involving university chaplains representing Christianity, Judaism and Islam.



a. Jewish persona doll with mezuzah as talking point.



b. Story bag used to illustrate the story of the lost sheep.



c. Islamic prayer mat including permitted Islamic art.

Figure 1 a.- c. example artefacts
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3. Specialist tutor-led school work

The specialist modules embed classroom experiences enabling student teachers to refine their craft and apply effective pedagogy. This experience is unique in allowing students to learn through personal enquiry in non-graded situations. They are able to trial techniques and strategies under the leadership and guidance of the specialist RE tutor in incrementally more independent and challenging contexts (see Table 1).

One student teacher said, "I've had so many opportunities, so much input, so much chance to progress and develop."

Another highlighted the uniqueness of the model by stating "Class teachers' feedback on my RE on regular placements lacked subject focus; it was *whether 'everything is coloured in right' and whether 'there is some writing'*, meaning I was unsure if I was on the right track about what an RE teacher was supposed to be' and whether the pupils had progressed. But Simon observing me just for just ten minutes provided such rich feedback."

	Placement Outcomes	Context	Tutor-mentor's role
Exp. 1 COE school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying characteristics of RE teaching & learning • Plan and conduct small group work related to RE tutor's whole class (w-c) introduction and plenary session for each lesson 	<p>School: Faith - Church of England</p> <p>Theme: Christian prayer (Y5)</p> <p>Duration: 2 linked lessons</p> <p>Staffing: Student teacher teams of 3-4 per small group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model the planning and interactive teaching and learning (intro & plenaries) • Student teachers observe and evaluate modelled pedagogy & pupil impact
Exp. 2 Community school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan appropriately pitched and progressive sequences of lessons for w-c and groups • Use evidence-based formative assessment of individual pupils to adapt provision 	<p>School: Community</p> <p>Theme: Judaism (Y1) or Islam (Y3)</p> <p>Duration: 3 linked lessons</p> <p>Staffing: Student teacher teams of 2-3 per class</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide written feedback on lesson plans prior to delivery • Observe lessons alongside class teachers • Provide oral and written feedback, guiding Student teachers to adapt next lesson provision
Exp. 3 multi-cultural school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan appropriately pitched and progressive lessons to facilitate depth of pupil knowledge & enquiry using cross curricular & resource rich learning • Use 'learning-led' planning to predict potential misconceptions and include appropriate pedagogic skills 	<p>School: Community - multi-cultural</p> <p>Theme: choice of age group</p> <p>Duration: 4 linked lessons</p> <p>Staffing: Student teacher teams of 1-2 per class</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise and provide written feedback on medium term plans prior to teaching • Drop-in observations of lessons; provide oral post-session feedback • Coach to facilitate self-reflection on teaching and learning to identify subsequent provision for individual pupils

Table 1: Model of progressive specialist RE school embedded work school types based on British government school descriptions <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school>

4. Impact on student teachers' development

This model has a transformative impact on specialist student teachers' development who particularly valued the following aspects of this methodology:

- Observing the specialist tutor teach RE
- Working in small teaching teams to plan and teach
- Progressively challenging settings
- Placing the learning needs of the children above the implementation of predetermined content or pedagogical approaches
- Specialist tutor supporting their reflective evaluations through a 'realistic' rather than 'apprenticeship' approach to mentoring
- Being able to explore innovative practice, free from the constraints of graded and target driven placements

5. Example of deep reflection

A student teacher modelled for children how to reflect on personal relationships with someone important to them using drawing. His example being reading to his daughter (Figure 2). However, he reflected that the impact of the modelling was limited because whilst he modelled how to complete the task using his drawing, he failed to sufficiently verbalise his artistic choices as shown in the annotations in Figure 2. He said in relation to working as a team, "It's enabled me to hear the critical voice of my colleagues and see what actually did impact children's learning and what didn't by unpicking the small aspects of our teaching to a new, deeper level."

The dark around the edges but the light in the middle shows people that this is a safe place.



The chair is in the middle since when we read a book together it feels we are the only people in the world.

Figure 2: Student teacher's modelling of capturing thinking through art
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Applying innovative practice

One student teacher deploying Philosophy for Children (P4C) in RE helped a Y5 class to enquire into the nature of the Jewish God, by using the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac. The question raised and selected by the class was "Why would God say to kill someone when it is written in the Ten Commandments not to murder?" This provoked a range of issues to be discussed, from the distinction between 'sacrifice' and 'murder' to the question of human free will. Then the student teacher enabled them to conclude that the story helps Jewish believers today trust in a faithful, all-knowing, God.

The student teacher remarked: "Without collaborating with Simon and my fellow students, I wouldn't have prompted such depth of thinking in pupils, probably not for another three or four years. I would not have been brave enough to try P4C on my own with a class teacher just from reading about it."