Session on Culham St Gabriel's Research Strategy / Research for RE website for PGCE, BEd, TeachFirst students

Notes for session leaders

Introduction

These notes are for use with the accompanying power-point presentation. The presentation developed over a series of five visits by Kevin O'Grady to different universities over 2018-19, to run a session with PGCE or BEd RE students on the Culham St Gabriel's research strategy and, in particular, how they could make practical use of the Research for RE website. These sessions were well-received, and the intention now is hand over the materials for tutors to use independently. If you are planning to run the session with your students, you are advised to spend some prior time familiarising yourself with the Research for RE website, reading through these session leader notes and looking over the power-point. The session is timed flexibly at around 90 minutes, and you can adapt it to your own timings and purposes. Every member of the group will need access to an online computer during the session. We've tended to run it in university computer suites. Also, **you'll need print-outs of slide 11 available for each student**, before you begin, and we've found it best to make these A3 size.

Slide 1

In giving this introduction to your group, do stress the practical, useful intent of the session. As we'll see later, previous students have found it to be helpful in getting to grips with various aspects of preparation to teach RE.

Slide 2

This is just some brief background information on CStG. Later, students may wish to visit our different websites to find out more about the trust and the support we offer to

RE teachers at all career stages. See https://www.cstg.org.uk/ and
https://www.reonline.org.uk/

Slide 3

And some background information on our research strategy, to give context – talk it through briefly, but there isn't any need to spend a great deal of time here – stress that the two parts of the strategy did emerge from a national consultation.

Slide 4

In the same vein, some information on our Research7 project series. It isn't the main concern of this session – the Research for RE website is – but the group may find it interesting to hear about and may want to keep abreast of developments over 2019-2020. The series culminates in a RExChange conference on 3 October 2020 at King Edward V1 School, Birmingham, a date you and they may wish to save.

Slide 5

At this stage, I'd just talk through the introduction to the Research for RE website without asking the students to log on to it yet. There's more to say by way of introduction for now and if they turn to the site at this point they'll probably get immersed in it, focusing less on what you will say and discuss (next) about this session and about research in general.

Slide 6

Self-explanatory overview of the session as a whole.

Slide 7

This activity's important, for clarifying some terms, getting everybody on the same page and drawing on existing knowledge and experience. Obviously research activities and definitions of research vary. If it helps, I like Lawrence Stenhouse's definition: 'research is systematic inquiry made public'. You might want to get the group into pairs or small groups for 5-10 minutes to discuss the questions, then go around and take feedback for another 5 minutes or so.

(Stenhouse, L. 1981. What counts as research?, British journal of educational studies, 29, 103–114 doi:10.1080/00071005.1981.9973589)

Slide 8

Here's some research evidence on . . . how teachers have found research to be useful to them! Again, the slide's just for talking through briefly and perhaps taking one or two comments, though if you or the students want to follow up the reference later, the article cited is summarised on the Research for RE website.

Slide 9

A screenshot of part of the front page of the site, as a cue to what to expect when you log on: you can look at reports of research, opportunities for research and ideas for research, and the site is searchable. In this session we focus on reports of research.

Slide 10

Another screenshot, given just to illustrate some of the variety of research reports available via the site, ranging (in this small sample) over generic findings on marking to research on the nature of religion. In fact, some of the Research for RE website would be of use to teachers of any subject. An example follows next.

Slide 11

This screenshot is of the key findings section of our report of research by Robert Bjork and Elizabeth Bjork on how teachers can boost pupils' learning by putting certain 'difficulties' before them. The full report's at

https://researchforre.reonline.org.uk/research_report/boosting-learning-by-making-it-desirably-difficult/?show_me=&about=&taxes=

At this point, just talk the group through the different teaching strategies on the slide (as stated earlier, they should also have a print-out each) and check that they understand what each strategy means.

Slide 12

These are my (brief) suggestions on how the Bjork and Bjork strategies might be applied to RE specifically, again, to be talked through with the group, with understanding checked. However, RE teachers, including your group, might have their own ideas! Thus:

Slide 13

The task seems to work well as an individual one. They can think either about a topic they've taught or are planning to, but it should be a particular RE one, rather than asking them to think about teaching or RE teaching in general. Ask them to be specific: how might particular strategies recommended by Bjork and Bjork have improved your teaching of a particular RE topic, or stand to do so in future? They should write brief notes on the print-outs (A3 size provides plenty of space) and be ready to feed back. This is also a chance to raise questions or doubts about the Bjork and Bjork strategies; we want the students to be critical, in the broadest sense. When they're ready, you can time and direct the feedback depending on your needs (e.g. you might have time to hear from all members of the group, you might not).

Slide 14

Time for your group to turn to the site, having had some training in effective ways to use it, and explore it for themselves. However, we want to maintain the practical focus on teaching and learning. That's why this task asks for selection of one report only and for remarks on its interest and uses. They will need 30 minutes for the task. Again, timing of the feedback part depends on your needs and circumstances.

Slide 15

These are simply headings to guide your plenary. I think it is a good idea to go around the group and get every member to indicate and commit to their follow-up intentions at this stage. You might want to return to the discussion with reminders and updates in future sessions – that is, members of the group could have chances in the future to talk about how they have been using the site since this session and what has been particularly interesting or useful.

Slides 16, 17 and 18

Slide 15 could be your conclusion, or, if you have time, you could drop in these three slides (or, do that at another point in the session, if you prefer). Here, we have three 2018-19 PGCE students reflecting on their own chosen research reports (having done the task at slide 14) and what they found to be useful or interesting about them. These are included simply as illustrations, for you to discuss with your group, or use in ways you find advantageous during the session.

Slide 19

These are some suggestions from Dawn Cox about how the Research for RE website can be used to help with career development at different career stages.

Slide 20

Please do stress to your students that I'd be very keen to have their feedback on the site, and especially examples of how they've used research reports to develop and improve their RE teaching.

Kevin O'Grady

September 19th 2019