

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: THEORY AND TEACHING PRACTICE

Session Religious Education b:

TEACHING RE IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Different pedagogical approaches to Religious Education (RE) can be viewed globally in different contexts and the types of RE delivering the curriculum and its aims. Approaches that historically form a framework of distinguishable as well as interrelated paradigms which are also associated with the application and experimentation of various pedagogical/teaching techniques are derived from the sciences of Education and their development basically after 1970 (Grimmitt, 2000; Buchanan, 2005; Erricker, 2010; Baumfield, 2016). As an ordinary subject of the school curriculum in Primary and Secondary Education RE follows contemporary teaching methodologies which determine the atmosphere of a pleasant and non-threatening classroom and, above all, the learning processes that occur in the classroom, in which significant and big ideas are 'imparted and learned, and presented in a clear and comprehensible manner, which is in fact an expression and synergy of manifold didactic-methodological and social competences' (Berner, Isler & Weidinger, 2018, p.11). Given that understanding religion in the safe space of the school and a competence associated with intercultural competences and competences for democratic culture are crucial in contemporary world, it is obvious that teaching RE and, teaching in RE is a distinctive topic that matters when we speak about education that aims to enable students to become active citizens with democratic competences.

The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) (Council of Europe, 2018) provides a useful set of criteria that can help to recognise whether teaching RE and teaching in RE delivers Democratic Citizenship (DC) as well. The questions below can be used to reflect on how to organise the learning opportunities in the classroom:

- ▶ To what extent would you say your teaching contributes towards learners becoming active citizens/respecting human rights?
- ▶ How often do your students have an opportunity to express their own ideas/ listen to different views, discuss their differences in class?
- ▶ How often are questions raised in the classes you teach relevant to human rights, democratic citizenship, justice, equality or the rule of law?
- ▶ How is your current practice facilitating the development of intellectual, personal and social resources that will enable learners to participate as active citizens?
- ▶ How are you providing time for learners to work with each other to strengthen their understanding, as well as practice social skills, thus fostering both individual and social processes and outcomes?



- ▶ How often are you including practical activities and experiential approaches?
- ▶ Do you effectively bring learners' previous experience into your teaching?' (Council of Europe, 2018, Vol.III, p.27).

Moreover, Michael Grimmitt's and Robert Jackson's work in teaching methodology in 2000's opens new areas of experiments, theory and, practice developments which, here, illustrate considerably the aforementioned criteria that highlight the relevance to DC in RE.

It is important when RE teachers starts to plan the lesson to recognise that their lesson should be planned according to Jackson's suggestions:

- ▶ recognising the importance of encouraging pupils to reflect;
- ▶ using knowledge about pupils' needs, cognitive skills, experience and thoughts in planning lessons;
- ▶ including work that encourages pupils (especially boys) to write in order to explain and defend their ideas;
- ▶ including pupil's written reflection or 'inner dialogue' in teaching material
- ▶ using pupil's own problems as a starting point for lessons.' (Jackson, 2004, 102-103).

In addition, they should always pre- and post- test their lesson plans in order to additionally accomplish RE's criteria by asking themselves:

1. What kind or kinds of interaction between the pupils and religious content does the model seek to promote?
2. What pedagogical procedures or strategies does the model deploy in order to achieve the kind or kinds of interaction identified above?
3. What pedagogical principles inform the model's pedagogical procedures and strategies, including its approach to the choice of curriculum content?' (Grimmitt, 2000, 26).

It is not that difficult to find which teaching approach is right, given that modern pedagogy offers a rich repertoire of methods and approaches such as the ones in the below table (Council of Europe, 2018, Vol.III, p.29)

Process-oriented methods and approaches	Content-based methods and approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Modelling democratic attitudes and behaviours – Democratic processes in the classroom – Co-operative learning – Project-based learning – Service learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Using the existing curriculum – within subject areas – Team teaching and integrated curricular approaches – Addressing the “hidden curriculum”.

A categorization of the teaching techniques may be useful. Of course, many techniques belong to many categories at the same time, as they are used in many ways but they can be divided into seven major categories:

- 1) Direct Teaching: These activities have direct interaction between students and teacher (brainstorming, storytelling, etc.)
- 2) Teamwork: Techniques that require work in groups and most often with a worksheet or written instructions (e.g., role cards). It is important when students are divided into groups to take on specific roles, depending on the needs of the activity. Also, the instructions and time limits work best when they are clear.
- 3) Dialogue: All the techniques in this category are those that require argumentation (contradictions, positive-negative, etc.), but also exchange of views, observations on a subject of study (artful thinking). In these, the teacher, not only supports and facilitates but also, in many techniques participates equally.
- 4) Problem solving: This is where eminently exploratory techniques seek information and study a subject from different perspectives (six thinking hats, case study, etc.)
- 5) Play / Action: The most creative techniques, which leave a lot of room for self-action, imagination and artistic expression (conversion of text into art, still images, etc.) The techniques in this category allow students to express themselves, their emotions, and thoughts in different ways, and to connect their experiences and lived situations with the taught topics and experiences.
- 6) Project: Includes the longest-running processes, which engage students in action-oriented enquiry of social topics which are important to them. It requires in-depth planning and collaboration as well as a final product of the study which can be presented to the public for feedback.
- 7) Assessment: Everything that students do, write or say at any point in the lesson is an assessment material. In this category techniques are included that evaluate the results of a learning process, help student's and teacher's reflection, i.e., reflection circles at the end of the lesson, diary etc.

It is important to clarify that from the wide number of techniques RE teachers should select the ones in their planning that include opportunities for:

Experience

Comparison

Analysis

Reflection and

Action.

These are the basic planning principles.

Planning a RE lesson using CDC

Methodologically there are different types of lesson plan which each accordingly use specific criteria based on pedagogical approaches and education philosophy. In any case planning a lesson means that RE teachers prepare a detailed description of the course of action and the intended learning processes for a particular timed lesson and a guide for what students are going to learn, how the lesson is taught, and the learning outcomes to be assessed. The lesson plan itself varies based on the RE teacher's individual teaching competences, what the topic of the lesson is, and the needs of each student in each class. The idea in using the Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) (twenty competences that individuals require to function as democratically and intercultural competent citizens) and their descriptors (descriptions of observable behaviours that indicate the achievement of a certain level of proficiency with regard to a competence) is that they provide a tool for planning a lesson teaches the subject (RE) and DC in parallel. The RE curriculum and RFCFC principles and criteria provide what is needed for the topic, the objectives, the intended learning outcomes, teaching methodology and assessment and, the descriptors meet an overall need to ensure the development of CDC in Primary and Secondary students. For these two elements are essential according to the RFCDC and the need for competence descriptors

1. the possibility to assess the current level of proficiency of learners on each of the competences, with a view to identifying their learning needs and areas for further development; and
2. references for educators which can help them to design, implement and evaluate educational interventions, in formal and non-formal settings.

(Council of Europe, 2018, Vol.I, p. 59, 37).

In order to follow the proposed type of lesson planning in RE it is essential to elaborate the concepts of which their understanding is a presupposition.

Conceptuality

RE teaches religious concepts (Erricker, 2010, pp.91-92) either familiar to the students and easily understood ones such as love, or less familiar and more difficult to understand such as sin. Concepts in unfamiliar religious languages are also taught which are even more unfamiliar such as nirvana. The religious conceptualisation of the concepts is important for students and their lives when it helps them understand and interpret themselves, others, the world and God, if they believe. This means although the concepts are covered by the curriculum, the uncovering of the relationship that they may have with the students' lives is the responsibility of the educator. For that reason, a lesson plan is needed with the course of the learning opportunities supplied to the students, preferably those which require the least possible guidance with the greatest possible outcomes.

The big idea



The relationship between knowledge and the context of learning when applied to the reality experienced by students is crucial for the acquisition of knowledge and its viability. That is why, in the end, knowledge is concerned with big ideas, basic/fundamental issues concerning life, which are understood from religious content and the language of RE. This big idea encapsulated in every course or unit must come first in the lesson planning and the development of Intended Learning Outcomes, since they definitely both deliver this. The big idea not only undergirds learning processes and knowledge, also it underlies the religious topics and their importance for students' lives or emerges from studying it. The teaching, consequently, is concerned with the big idea of this/these and how the big idea acquires meaning through religion. Thus, the RE teachers, based on their pedagogic skills, plan a course of meaningful activities while bearing in mind the importance of the religious conceptualization of the concepts for the lives of the students, that are to be taught in RE. That means that the aim is to enable students to acquire an in-depth understanding of the complexity of the different notions and interpretations of the concept in order to evaluate their usefulness for their lives when directly related to the big idea.

The big idea is related to the religious content, but it must be: a) broad and abstract, b) expressed concisely in one or two words, c) universal, d) timeless, e) represented in different ways that share common attributes (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006, pp. 69-70).

Intended Learning Outcomes

The actions of the students based on the content of RE is comprised of their learning experiences in class; in other words, the knowledge they sufficiently acquire with the teaching. The students are invited to act according to the levels of learning/categories of knowledge (Remembering/Recognition/Understanding, Application, Analysis, Judgement/Evaluation, Creation/Synthesis/Production), and the domains of learning (Cognitive-knowledge, Affective-emotion, Psychomotor-action) (Krathwohl, 2002) and for them to learn that these actions and behaviours should not only be applied at the end of the lesson but for always. That is why the RE teacher decides, based on the big idea and the religious content, which resource provides meaning of the concept, and what the students should do in class for the learning outcome to be achieved. These actions are actually the Intended Learning Outcomes, understandings, knowledge and skills that learners need to achieve mastery of the actions. They are planned based on the criterion of the abilities of the students and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978) so a) that their achievement may be evaluated and b) the higher level of learning presupposes the previous level. In this way the Intended Learning Outcomes are not concerned only with skills. On the one hand, they are referring to actions, on the other supported by cognitive and metacognitive strategies which require understanding of the important content, for the result to be realized. At the same time, they are concerned with knowledge and skills, and in many cases, attitudes.

A table of verbs categorized into the levels of learning/categories of knowledge is always useful in lesson planning.

Definitions	I. Remembering	II. Understanding	III. Applying	IV. Analysing	V. Evaluating	VI. Creating

Bloom's Definition	Exhibit memory of previously learned material by recalling facts, terms, basic concepts, and answers.	Demonstrate understanding of facts/ideas by organizing, comparing, interpreting, giving descriptions, and stating main ideas.	Solve problems in new situations by applying acquired knowledge, facts, techniques and rules in a different way.	Examine and break information into parts by identifying motives or causes. Make inferences and find evidence to support generalizations.	Present and defend opinions by making judgments about information, validity of ideas, or quality of work based on a set of criteria.	Compile information together in a different way by combining elements in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions.
Verbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose • Describe • Define • Find • Label • List • Match • Name • Recall • Refer to • Relate • Reproduce • Restate • Select • Show • Spell • State • Tell • Specify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What - When - Where - Which - Who - Why 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classify • Compare • Contrast • Define • Demonstrate • Explain • Extend • Generate • Illustrate • Indicate • Interpret • Judge • Label • List • Measure • Outline • Recognise • Relate • Rephrase • Show • Summarize • Translate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply • Assemble • Build • Calculate • Choose • Construct • Debate • Derive • Develop • Exhibit • Experiment with • Formulate • Identify • Interview • Make use of • Model • Organize • Plan • Present findings • Select • Solve • Utilize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse • Assume • Categorize • Classify • Compare • Conclusion • Contrast • Discover • Dissect • Distinguish • Divide • Examine • Function • Identify • Inference • Inspect • List • Motive • Predict • Resolve • Simplify • Survey • Take part in • Test for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate • Agree • Appraise • Assess • Award • Challenge • Choose • Compare • Conclude • Criteria • Criticise • Decide • Defend • Determine • Discriminate • Distil • Estimate • Evaluate • Explain • Influence • Interpret • Judge • Justify • Mark • Measure • Perceive • Prioritize • Prove • Recommend • Resolve • Select • Suggest • Support • Value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt • Arrange • Build • Change • Choose • Combine • Compile • Compose • Construct • Create • Delete • Design • Develop • Discuss • Elaborate • Estimate • Extrapolate • Formulate • Imagine • Improve • Initiate • Invent • Maximize • Minimize • Modify • Organise • Perform • Plan • Predict • Prepare • Produce • Propose • Prove • Solve • Suppose • Synthesise • Test • Transfer • Transform

Learning



Learning is achieved through experience. It is comprised of a process of thinking, reflection, and action and is imprinted from the meanings of interaction and transformation. The learning process involves different forms of interaction, through which the student acts and, based on his own personal position and cognition, understands the religious content through a process of conceptualising and re-conceptualising, if there is previous knowledge of the concepts, which function within a specific religious context.

Based on the relationship of action (with the religious content) and its effect in the classroom, the student can directly transform whatever new knowledge he/she has learnt into action. To act, therefore, internally and externally and is thereby to use the experiences of RE to act and re-act in society or in the religious community, now and in the future. The transformation of knowledge into action is fundamentally the product of learning. An example from research (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2020): In a lesson in a second-year High school class, students were asked (N=61) before the lesson “Can the human depict God”? 41% replied that “Humans cannot depict God”. To the same question after the lesson (3x two-hour lessons), 58% replied “we can depict God”, and 42% “Humans can depict God”. Apart from the difference in the answers before and after, which are statistically important based on the t-test ($p < 0,01$), the use of the verb “we can depict” is noted because it reveals personal thought and action.

In learning action is quite important. Thought and reflection as processes play an important role in the conceptualization of concepts, but by themselves these processes do not lead to learning. Not even action, without thought and reflection, can be considered learning. Learning would appear to be a combination of the aforementioned, which includes the process of transformation. This then leads to education, which is comprised not only of the awareness of specific content but of the experience of “events with meaning” (Dewey, 1929, p.331; Biesta, 2014). It concerns the relationship between human actions and the consequences of these actions.

Knowledge processes

Knowledge is a set of capabilities. They are not just mental capacities. They are competences for living and doing things with them in the world. Additionally, as social existences humans build knowledge by living with others. It is the result of what they learned from others with whom they live. The lesson in class is life and follows the natural knowledge processes of the individual. Based on these, every time students learn a) firstly they experience a known experience of the big idea from their own lives, b) afterwards they have encountered a new experience which makes sense of the previous one, but with a religious subject matter, which is concerned with the concept they are invited to understand, c) this is followed by a third experience, in which the religious content is functionally analysed, systematically exploring causes and effect and developing ‘chains of reasoning that are closely connected with other knowledge processes’ (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p.247) and, d) lastly, is transformed into action which has been experienced and embraces and applies this new knowledge to real life situations (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, pp.238-249). Knowledge is not produced in school if the students do not recognize it as being of benefit to them. That is why the evaluation of the achievements of the student is contained within the four stages. The four stages, finally, are not evenly distributed



throughout a lesson. However, every lesson is always developed within these four stages, independently of its duration.

Reflection

Basic knowledge and meta-cognitive strategy of recognition, application/management and understanding of the knowledge of RE, is reflection. It is concerned with teaching and the individuation of knowledge, which is drawn from the teaching experiences and, initially contributes to the action of instruction, but also later to life, when it comes to the transformation of knowledge into action. Reflective expressing helps the students in the recognition and use of the new knowledge, as well as its evaluation in relation to its benefit for the students' own lives. It is essential to undergo this learning process in every lesson as through the recognition of contemplative and interactive processes, the students reflect and re-reflect on what they have done and learnt, and in many cases, why they did what they did in the classroom and why they learnt it. Through this repeated procedure the students are educated on how to reflect, understand what they know and learn how to learn.

It may comprise the end of an activity and mainly the end of a lesson. The basic tool for this is the student journal, with specific repeated questions. The re-reflection cycle at the end of an activity or at the end of the lesson, has also been shown to be effective. This is facilitated by recognition questions which within the group function inter-subjectively and activate every member. The questions are specific, as these ultimately educate students in re-reflection. They clearly help to evaluate what was, for the students, most beneficial from the lesson and to ascertain the degree of acquisition of the results from the teaching and the learning outcomes. The first is important as it gives the students a voice, they are not treated simply as learners but are treated as equals, as speakers (Biesta, 2010). This means that their views and judgements are important to the group, and especially for the RE teacher. Without this final action/expression in an activity or in a lesson, learning remains undetected and opaque.

Reflection assists the RE teacher in the evaluation process. With this, the students evaluate what they have learnt and appreciate their convictions and opinions in the light of their new knowledge. Self-evaluation is a part of, and a form of, self-reflection (Fancourt, 2016, pp.55-56) and although it can be connected to the teacher's evaluation and the assessment, it overshoots them because it is both a holistic and special process which clearly implies a point of view from the educator as to what knowledge and learning is. Finally, the teacher ascertains from the lesson what really functioned as beneficial for the students and the degree of acquisition of the Intended Learning Outcomes. Without this, the outcomes of the lesson are unclear or may be different from what was intended.

Learning by Design

From the above it is obvious that in planning RE lessons the focus is on developing and deepening understanding of important, big ideas. As Grant Wiggins and Jay Mc Tighe say in their book 'Understanding by Design' teachers should always answer, with their lesson plan, the questions:

'How do we make it more likely -by our design- that more students really understand what they are asked to learn?

What must our planning entail to have an intellectual impact on everyone: the less experienced; the highly able, but unmotivated; the less able; those with varied interests and styles?' (Wiggins & Mc Tighe, 2006, p.4).

The parts of Understanding by Design compromise the parts of the lesson planning:

- 1) Establish goals, content ('students will know') and outcomes ('Students will able to do"):

Big idea of the lesson according to understandings and essential questions for students

Intended Learning Outcomes of the lesson according to the curriculum, students needs and, the development of their competences for democratic culture

- 2) Design assessment evidence (students' performance tasks and other evidence):

Assessments and evaluation in the learning plan included in the teaching activities.

- 3) Develop a learning plan to achieve the outcomes (where are we going? how will we reach the destination? when and how can we recognise that the destination has been reached?):

A course of **experiential learning activities** which depict the learning outcomes and hook the students in and challenge them to rethink/revise, reflect and evaluate (meta-cognitive knowledge).

