Methods of Differentiation in Religious Education

by

Stephen Cappleman
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The Cherwell School
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Key Words

- Differentiation

- Kinaesthetic

- Auditory

- Visual

- Learning methods

- Learning styles

- Scaffolding
Aims of this report

This report is a summary of some methods and ideas I have discovered both before and during my Farmington award, investigating differentiation and RE. During my study I have been able to investigate new directions in teaching and learning theory, that stress a need for teachers to focus on the different ways humans learn and remember. This report looks at a model of three different learning styles: kinaesthetic, auditory and visual. It seeks to explore how these learning styles can be catered for within RE as important methods of differentiation within themselves. It also begins to explore ways and the necessity for a teacher to differentiate through scaffolding in each of those learning styles. The report is not exclusively targeted at RE teachers, as the methods I have learned seem applicable to many different subjects and learning environments. It has been my aim to include as many practical examples as possible, in order to prevent it being just a theoretical exercise and therefore of maximum use to teachers.

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Differentiation Within Course & Lesson

Preparation

This is an incredibly important way of differentiating RE that is rather like building and decorating a house. It is essential to get the foundations correct before you can even consider putting the walls up and roof on. Plastering and decorating are a stage later and moving in the furniture is even later still.

The foundations

These are the courses you run. They depend on your agreed syllabus and/or examination board. Boards now have increasingly good specifications that interconnect with certificates of achievement. 'The Welsh Joint Examinations Board' has excellently differentiated exams and I feel still leads the way in this area. When selecting a course some of the factors you will have to consider are:

1. How pupil centred are the topics? Subjects that are too philosophical could be difficult, as some SEN pupils with reading difficulties can find it hard to understand and process abstract ideas. This is of course not always true but it is a factor to bear in mind. Courses that centre on moral issues are easy to resource from the media, and prove to be definite winners. I have found pupils engage with the human element with more ease, beginning to philosophise from that entry point.

2. How is the course assessed? Does the course have differentiated exams, coursework and oral assessment methods? Does the course link into a youth award scheme and offer chances of task assessment? Pupils who learn in different ways will respond better to an assessment system that allows them to show their learning in a style
where they have natural talent. The present exam system is very narrow in its focus on the written word.

3. How will your pupils be grouped? Mixed ability, banded or setted? Course content will have to be considered when making this decision, as it might be very difficult to place pupils studying for different awards all in the same class.

The walls & roof

These are the schemes of work and the vital learning aims they contain. Clear aims at the course and lesson level will allow the creation of a purposeful feel for both pupils and teachers. I have found clear direction automatically has beneficial effects on planning and differentiation.

It is essential that teachers have other teachers to plan with. Constantly planning on ones own can make the creative juices dry up. Teachers often get stuck creating lessons that are very similar to each other, partly through lack of time and partly because we tend to sink into our preferred learning styles and create activities to suit them. The following section deals with different learning styles, it is important to plan in variety to your lessons making sure a scheme of work regularly attempts to vary the learning activities to interest the variety of ways humans learn.

Plaster, wallpaper and furniture

There is now increasing focus in education on the various ways humans learn. Theories range from three to eight different ways and often point to the narrow focus of British education that historically places reading and writing central whilst putting practical learning and oral work a definite second. This focus on the written word has become more acute over the past few years and has seen the erosion of many more practical courses. I believe this emphasis has its roots within the reformation, when doing activities and the arts were
stripped from the British Churches, institutions that played a major role in the creation of our present education system. Thankfully we may be seeing a very gradual reverse of that process with the widening of the curriculum at KS4.

Mike Hughes (2000), in his book 'Closing the Learning Gap' outlines three different learning styles Auditory, kinaesthetic and visual. He asserts, “In general terms, ... , people learn most effectively when working in their preferred learning style.” (page 41)

His book and others suggest that teachers should develop a variety of activities into schemes of work and lessons to ensure that each pupil is engaged in learning. A failure to incorporate a variety of activities is, to him, a failure to differentiate that can have serious consequences for motivation, interest and behaviour.

“... working outside their preferred styles on a regular basis can have a detrimental effect upon their motivation.” Hughes (2000, page 41).

Visual learners

These are people who tend to access and remember information best when they are given it in written and pictorial forms.

Auditory learners

These are people who tend to access and remember information best when they are given it in oral presentations, one to one explanations, and it is associated with music.

Kinaesthetic learners

These are people who tend to access and remember information best when they do active learning experiences like drama, model creation and sequencing activities.

"Kinaesthetic learners are the students who are most disadvantaged in secondary schools, simply because so many
learning activities are based upon reading, writing and listening.” Hughes (2000 page 41).

It is important to note that much of the literature I have read points to the fact that people often span different styles. It is also important to engage pupils in the need to have a good working knowledge of each style to prepare them for the world outside school; variation is the name of the game.

Lesson structure

Structuring lessons for challenging classes can be difficult. Changeable elements enter into the equation such as weather, what happened at break time and who has just split up with whom and are having a row about it. I have come to believe that there is no perfect model for lesson structure. Good planning can take you a long way but experience will help you deal with those changeable situations that walk through your classroom door.

This said I have been struck by some of the latest research and insight into the workings of the brain. Mike Hughes and 'The Brain Gym' materials ask us to consider closely how our bodies and brains work when planning and differentiating lessons.

Concentration Span

"The maximum time for which children can concentrate is approximately two minutes in excess of their chronological age in minutes. Even adults cannot concentrate for longer than 20-25 minutes." Hughes (2000, page 25).

I have found considering concentration span very important, especially when teaching pupils with SEN's. Activities and verbal introductions need to be kept short and snappy to avoid pupils attention wandering. Mike Hughes recommends three main activities in a lesson of one hour, which, with the other small things that need to be added in, will mean activities last
around 15-20 minutes maximum. Personally I have found that you cannot always be that prescriptive with your timing, although on a task that takes a long time a break for pupils to have some ‘Time-out’ can be beneficial.

**Time Out**

In my previous school the geography department experimented with offering two minute breaks within a lesson to help pupils gather their thoughts and refocus when the lesson started again. Mike Hughes points to the fact that when a pupil sits for just 15 minutes, their ability to learn can decrease dramatically due to lack of oxygen to the brain.

"The brain uses in excess of 20% of the body’s oxygen. It also requires water, rest and protein to function efficiently.” Hughes (2000, page 29).

As soon as a pupil sits at rest their heartbeat slows breathing calms and becomes shallower and thus the amount of oxygen flowing to the brain decreases. I have witnessed pupils beginning to nod-off due to this lack of oxygen, coupled with a warm classroom. So how can you remedy this?

1. A short break to chat and have a quick drink can help revitalise students for a new bout of learning.

2. A previous deputy head teacher of mine would get pupils to stand up pack their bags and swap seats or just walk around the room, if she felt they were losing their edge.

3. Less dramatic ways of fitting in movement can be helpful. Calling pupils out to hand in homework involves movement and an increase in heart rate, blood pressure and the flow of oxygen to the brain.

4. Getting a group of pupils at a time to go around and examine other group’s work.

5. Allow those pupils who fidget and find it hard to sit for a long period to move more by giving them jobs like handing out books etc.
Some people also allow pupils to drink water and have a quick snack in lessons as they point to the fact that both water and energy are essential to maintaining a brain fit for learning. Sugary drinks just tend to give the pupil a temporary high with a more dramatic low afterwards and should be discouraged. It seems a shame that we cannot get school canteens to take this idea on board.

**BEM Principle**

This is the idea that a pupil is more receptive to learning right at the beginning and end of an activity and lesson.

"The beginning, in particular, is the time when the potential for learning is at its greatest, ... concentration, ... particularly anticipation, make the learner more receptive." Hughes (2000, page 37)

The beginning of a lesson should be used effectively. Avoid taking in homework; calling the register or other distractive things that could be done later when pupils are tired. Such necessary activities could be placed at convenient 'break-times' during the lesson. Instead focus on the three key learning objectives of the lesson and launch into the first activity. This will help those SEN pupils who find difficulty transferring large quantities of information from short to long-term memory, or those who have poor short-term memories when it comes to speech. Mike Hughes recommends that you have about three major beginnings and endings in a lesson that are directly related to the learning aims on the board. Pupils can feel empowered by the fact they know what they need to learn and are not just scrambling in the dark. I have found they remember these key points much better by having them reiterated,
attached and repeated within the relevant section of the lesson.

**Pupil Choice**

Pupils respond very well to being given choices. They feel they have control over their learning, which can increase motivation. Recently I taught an introductory RE course to year nine pupils who came from middle to upper school. I placed as much choice into the lesson as possible. I made four fact sheets with different categories on them, each about a different religion. The pupils chose which religion they wanted to study and which category they were most interested in on the sheet. They were asked to present about three things they did not know at the start, in a mode of their choice. I suggested various methods from the creation of newspaper articles, through play scripts and song lyrics to artwork and cartoon strips. The response was stunning. Hard working pupils produced excellent materials one of which, a rap song, was performed at the end of the lesson to the rest of the class. Weaving pupil choice into learning can help them avoid repetition. I found it very beneficial to the motivation of SEN pupils as they could play to their strengths rather than being made to revisit their weaknesses.
Differentiating for Kinaesthetic Learners

“Kinaesthetic learners are the students who are most disadvantaged in secondary schools, simply because so many learning activities are based upon reading, writing and listening. This is partly because most teachers, who themselves have been successful in the reading, writing, listening world of formal schooling, are visual or auditory learners and predominantly teach in their preferred style.”
Hughes (2000 page 41)

RE teachers are extremely lucky that there is such a healthy kinaesthetic learning tradition within our subject area. Indeed religions are full of activities that can be so easily turned into fun doing activities within lessons. I am fortunate to have worked with my previous head of department at Wood Green School, who actively encouraged me to recreate ceremonies and do any role-plays I could think up. I will not go through everything I have seen or done here, but will instead give a list of some possible general activities and brief examples of how they could be translated into RE lessons. I will use the kinaesthetic learning categories laid out by Mike Hughes in his book ‘Closing the Learning Gap’ as the basis for the following list.

Paper Based Activities

1. Sorting activities. These activities seek to get pupils sequencing written material in a very hands-on way. I have used this idea in many areas. Here is a very brief guide about how to construct them.
   - Give the pupils slips of paper with information on cut up and placed in envelopes or secured with a paper clip.
   - Pupils can work in pairs and those who really struggle can save face by swapping around what they got wrong without others having to know. Even if they do this they
are learning the right order and processing information again.

- Care needs to be taken that the statements you give pupils are aimed at their reading age. Some of the original sorts I did were ditched as it became apparent there were too many ideas, multi-syllabic words and the sentences were simply too long. Keep the statements short and snappy and use a big font. If the groups you are aiming at are quite challenged or younger cut down the amount of statements you give them.

- Ensure you are very strict with the collection of the slips of paper. Check the floors under desks etc. Pupils soon learn to put them all back, although you will occasionally find some on the floor. I kept these in the plastic wallet I stored the sorts in and asked pupils to identify if they had a bit missing next time.

Here are different ways I have used sorts.

a) **Sorting for and against arguments** perhaps on topics such as abortion, euthanasia and the death penalty. You can give them this before they do a ‘Your Opinion’ question like the ones in most RE GCSE exams. Pupils ranking the arguments, the most convincing at the top and least at the bottom, could develop the sort. This is also a great avenue into discussions.

b) **Sorting ideas into their own rank order**. I made pupils examine their own passions by giving them a list of things that might interest them and getting them to place them in a pyramid shape. The most important thing to them went at the top and the less important ones below. I gave them passions as varied as painting and animal welfare through to family and skateboarding. I also inserted blank pieces of paper so they could add in their own.
c) **Get pupils to sort out the correct order of a simplified story.** I did this with stories such as the ‘Good Samaritan’ and ‘Lost Son’. If you have a good cartoon version from one of the kids, photocopy that and use it in a sort. Pupils take pride if you use their work as a demonstration model.

d) **Make pupils sort a jumbled up timeline into order.** Events in Jesus lifetime are just one idea for this.

e) **Get pupils to sort out the key words and pictures of a topic from the ones not necessary to use.** They can then use those words and pictures to create a mind map or board game to end a topic or revise one.

2. **Get pupils to complete a picture jigsaw puzzle.** The edges might not fit together in a typical jigsaw way but rather each pupil would have to rearrange the pieces and explain to the group/class why everything is where it is. You could do this with a picture of the crucifixion of Jesus. Where are the soldiers gambling? The sign with the INRI on? Etc. Pupils could make a jigsaw like this for another group who could be challenged to solve each other's and then be shown the original pictures.

**Role Plays**

1. **Create mimes, friezes and short plays** about different topics. Pupils could do this with the ten plagues of Egypt or the miracles of Jesus. The addition of a camera or video of the event motivates pupils as they very often love seeing the event later. Beware; I once lost control of a class because I was laughing so much at the supersonic speed of Moses' birth.

2. **Dummy ceremonial enactments** are a must. The list could be exhaustive from weddings to Sabbath table ceremonies, although I would steer clear of circumcision. You also need to be very careful to check that any food is
not given to pupils with allergies. You could challenge a
group of older pupils to investigate and re-enact
different wedding ceremonies. You might differentiate
this for pupils who find research difficult by giving them
the appropriate worksheets and books. Re-enactment
photos make brilliant displays that pupils often love.

3. **Make pupils assume the identities of different groups for whole class activities.** I heard of and then
embellished an activity about the Holocaust. I made
pupils wait outside the room as I stuck little yellow or
blue stickers onto each of them according to eye and hair
colour. I let the blues in first to pick the best seats and
very publicly gave them a sweet as they entered. The
others came in last without a sweet and were shown an
overhead of our new school rules for yellows and blues.
Blues got less homework, shorter days and coffee
vouchers while yellows got smaller breaks, more
homework and a longer school day etc. It was all great
fun, but then I made pupils read the Nuremberg laws and
the mood changed. It was one of the most gratifying
teaching experiences I have had. The realisation of the
inequity and unfairness of those laws was very much more
real to them. I was also able to draw upon the reactions
of the pupils themselves to the sweet handout. Some
blues told me it was not fair, some yellows tried to grab a
sweet and others protested loudly. One or two blues
shared their sweets and one even gave me it back again
saying it was unfair. Everyone eventually got a sweet but
I was able to draw on some of the reactions to highlight
the idea that some people protested, and some did
nothing.

This sort of re-enactment could be used for any
human rights study, from Black civil rights to feminist
politics.
Models

1. Create models. Previously I have helped pupils create the old RE favourite, a Mezuzah, as well as The Ark of the Covenant and memorial models for The Holocaust. Recently I experimented with asking pupils to 'create a prison'. I gave them a picture of a blank cell and a few very basic outlines of things like beds, TV's, toilets and buckets (all were cut up in envelopes). I also asked them to decide which buildings would be in it and gave simple diagrams of a prison chapel, gym, gardens and conjugal visiting cells. They had to select what they would have, adding in their own pictures and rejecting mine if they choose. Pupils were then given a questionnaire to establish the nature of their prison. Was the main emphasis reform or punishment? Some of the prisons I received back were focused on torture while others were places of education and reform. In the future I might ask pupils to create a punishment system for schools and relate those to the prison section. I have also given pupils the free choice of how to respond to a topic and received some interesting models back in return.

2. Challenging pupils to recreate a scene or idea using any object to hand in the class.

Movement & Touch

1. Make pupils move to different parts of the room according to their opinion on a topic. You could also get pupils to line up from one side to another depending on where they 'stand' on an issue. I last did this with the question 'Is their life after death?' Views ranged from definitely yes through maybe to definitely no.

2. Paper and string. Get pupils to write their names on a piece of paper and come and stick it on a piece of string. One end could be definitely yes the other no. I prefer
using paper clips as you can re-use the whole thing, sticky tape is too difficult to get off and means you have to throw away resources.

3. **Picture Sequencing.** Give pupils pieces paper with very simplified written or pictorial scenes of a story etc. Ask them get in a line that shows the correct sequence of the story. Care needs to be taken to avoid highlighting a pupil in the wrong place. You could just take the picture and ask where it should go, then the attention is on you and not them. You could just ask pupils to stick their segment onto a display board with a drawing pin.

4. **Snowball discussions** to allow movement to enter into the exercise. This will help avoid very active kinaesthetic learners fidgeting constantly as you build in movement for them. You could also spot those who fidget a lot and ask them to fetch books, give out items go on errands and bring their work to the teachers desk.

5. **Put an action to a key word** they have to remember. This may be more difficult in later secondary, as pupils will not do something they deem as un-cool. Many rappers like Eminem use hand gestures as part of speech and this could be highlighted. Pupils might be much more receptive to making up a sequence of rap movements about a topic than just simply movements.

6. Pupils could be asked to **describe an artefact** they are holding to a blindfolded partner. They could be blindfolded themselves and asked only to rely on touch to describe it to their friends.

7. **Give students artefacts** that correspond to something you are studying. One colleague laid us a table of objects relating to different texts. She asked us to guess which object went with which text. This was great fun and rather cheap, as you could use a number of household objects. You could do this with the parables of Jesus, using seed for ‘The parable of the Sower’ a toy pig for
'The Lost Son'. This could be great revision, as you could ask 'What is the parable?' Then they could be asked to describe the plot. Why stick to one object per story? Build up a few to cover different aspects of it. A bright coat and sandals along with a chocolate cake might fit very well for the ending of 'The Lost Son'.

In all, my advice is to experiment and share creative ideas as I have found the more you give the more you get.
Differentiating Discussions

Discussions are an area where some SEN pupils can shine in a way they may not in written work. It enables them to express ideas in formats other than writing or picture and can allow them to receive public praise for their thoughts. It can, however, pose a number of challenges to some pupils with SEN’s.

“Not all children know instinctively how to interact effectively, nor do interpersonal group skills magically appear when needed. Pupils must be taught these skills and motivated to use them.” Curry & Bromfield (1995 pages 11 & 12).

Those suffering with attention deficit problems can often find it hard to listen for any length of time due to their poor concentration span. Other learners who are more naturally kinaesthetic or visually based might find it hard to hold and process large quantities of speech. They may begin to ‘switch off’ more quickly than auditory learners posing possible behaviour management issues. You may also have pupils who have had speech and language difficulties or simply those who lack confidence verbalising their ideas in front of large numbers of people. I have found that there are always a number of pupils who find discussion hard to maintain for any length of time, they can interrupt their peers to add their ideas or a ‘cool’ comment. They start speaking to someone else (often about the topic or something someone has said) or they can try to dominate the discussion.
So how can you differentiate discussions to help ensure as many pupils as possible have meaningful engagements with peers and the chosen topic. During my Farmington award I have drawn together some of the methods I have used in my previous teaching experience and I have experimented with 'Circle Time' in a secondary context and other discussion and debating techniques learned from colleagues. I have come to the conclusion that to help pupils become good speakers and listeners, the whole school needs to focus upon a clear and simple set of expected skills and learning outcomes. This gives both staff and pupils an ongoing yardstick that that does not differ from subject to subject and allows for clear and easy target setting and conferencing about a child. The whole school literacy group within my school is adopting this idea modifying the grid below and seeking to make it used throughout the school.

**Discussion Evaluation Guides and Record Logs**

**Record Logs**

Targeted and ongoing teacher, peer and self-assessment can help SEN pupils. If the 'Discussion Self Assessment Sheet' (below) were stuck into the back of their books pupils could be asked to review debates and discussions by simply answering the questions on the sheet. After a while the pupils would see a log of their discussion evaluations build up that might help them recall these learning experiences in order to review progress. A focus on progress in discussion skills can be difficult for many pupils especially those with memory difficulties, as there is nothing solid for them to refer back to. A discussion log containing previous evaluations may help them recall and subsequently review.

**Modelling Discussion Skills**
Assessment could be done by the pupils themselves, their peers and teachers (perhaps through marking of their self-assessments. If a particular skill were focused upon in a lesson, a short discussion of what is 'good listening' could be held and a demonstration of good and bad given. This sort of activity will help pupils who struggle by scaffolding their learning and giving them very concrete aims, in much the same way model answers do in exam practice.

## Discussion Evaluation Sheet

**Answer the following questions before your discussion / debate:**

1. What is the topic of today’s discussion?
2. Is there a particular discussion skill you wish to focus on today?

**Answer these question after your discussion ranking each of the skill from 1 - 10. \[1 = \text{Low} \quad 5 = \text{Medium} \quad 10 = \text{High}\]**

1. How well did you do with the particular skill focused on today?
2. Rank the following skills from 1 - 10.
   
   a) Listening to other people  
   b) Not interrupting other people  
   c) Waiting your turn to speak  
   d) Being polite about other peoples ideas  
   e) Speaking at a sensible volume

3. Name three things about the topic you have learned or thought about.

## Getting Discussions Started

**Snowballing**

For pupils who find it difficult to speak in front of the class techniques such as 'Snowballing' are extremely valuable. Pupils are asked to discuss a topic in two’s, perhaps...
brainstorming an idea or making a list of the for or against arguments or even sorting an envelope of such arguments. You could lead straight into a class discussion from here and I have found that many more pupils are willing to speak after testing their ideas out with a peer partner. You could, however, ask pupils to join with another group of two and ask them to explain their ideas to the other two. You may change the focus of the task or ask them to perhaps argue for or against the idea using the arguments they have already discussed in two’s. The groups could feed back to the rest of the class in a number of ways:

1. Through a spokesperson
2. Through expressing just one or two ideas per group to keep the feedback snappy
3. The teacher can point at groups while one or two willing pupil scribes write the information onto the board. This scribe writing is particularly helpful when you have a class with behaviour issues. There are often a few pupils who enjoy writing on the board and it enables you to keep an eye on things and keep discussion flowing without having to stop and write. The material on the board can then be used in a follow-up activity.
4. Pupils in groups can design a sugar paper poster using art and words etc. You could then get each group to walk around the class looking at each other’s work or pass round the sheets from group to group spotting the different ideas you see. Those different ideas could then be verbalised to the class perhaps by each group being asked to a differences saw.

**Competition Debates**

A colleague taught me the idea of competition debating. The class is split into three sections ‘for’, ‘against’ and ‘undecided’. Some engineering of numbers may have to be done but pupils are generally very receptive to this. The ‘for’ and
'against' camps have ten minutes to think of their arguments and plan their introduction and closing speeches (emphasise that short and snappy is better as it helps them get started). You could give the 'Debating Focus Sheet' to pupils (see below). For groups who really struggle, you could have a 'for' and 'against' sorting activity as backup. This might help start the pupils own ideas flowing and if not verbalising the ideas in their own words helps them to think about them. The neutral group could be asked to think of some questions for the two teams and could themselves be given a sorting exercise. You could ask them to pick the best questions to ask and then make up two of their own or simply reword your ones.

You can limit their opening statement to one minute and then open the debate. You could also end it with a timed summary statement. The 'undecided' pupils then vote by moving to the side they want to win. Pupils could then complete a self-assessment.
We believe the statement is right/wrong/terrible because...
Firstly

Secondly

Thirdly

It could affect...
It would/could lead to...
It is not fair because...
The principle is wrong...
The long-term effects could be...
If people abuse the system...
**Circle Time Discussions**

‘Circle Time’ is a discussion, group and behaviour building technique used by many primary school teachers. It is beginning to filter through into secondary education and I decided to investigate it and use it in an RE/PSE context. I have found it very good at challenging and encouraging a number of pupils who find speaking and listening a challenge and who therefore have ‘special needs’ within this context. The method aims at promoting speaking, listening and cooperative skills within groups and the individuals that make them up. It does this through learning by the example of others, peer correction and being focused very much on the present moment. The teacher models good behaviour and tries to avoid confrontational situations. The pupil is encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour and the group is used to help them do this through peer discipline. I have found the techniques very beneficial although understand that I have much to learn about its skilful use. I would very much recommend using this technique, especially with challenging groups, but would also recommend reading more about it and if possible observing primary colleagues while they use it.

Mollie Curry and Carolyn Broomfield construct circle time in the following way. They break the activity down into approximately four slots.

1. The starting game
2. The round
3. The main activities
4. The end game

**The Circle**

Pupils and teacher should all be seated on chairs in a circle at the same height. This gives a sense of equality and stops some characters dominating the circle by sitting above the rest. It also avoids pupils hiding away due to shyness and a
lack of self-esteem. The circle also allows all to have eye contact.

**Starting Games**

These are fun games meant to enthuse the pupils and also to move them to different locations. Curry and Broomfield’s book contains a number of these games. One is where a person stands in the middle and has their chair removed. They say “The sun shines on those that wear…” the people with that coloured clothing or hair etc all have to swap seats. Another is where everybody is given the name of one of four fruits, apple, pear, banana and grapefruit. Again one person is in the middle and has to call a selected fruit and they all have to move. The person left without a seat becomes the caller. The addition of the term ‘Fruit Salad’ in this game makes everyone move.

This introduction does a number of things. It breaks up clumps of pupils and makes the class work next to new people. The teacher can keep the game going just long enough for the pupil seating to be acceptable to them. It also engages pupils in a fun activity instantly, getting the blood flowing, oxygen to the brain and pupils successfully joining in a group activity.

**The Round**

This is designed to allow each pupil to start speaking and listening in as easy and non-threatening way as possible. Pupils should be reminded about the rules of the circle, no interrupting, no speaking about what someone has said (especially not the teacher as they are trying to model good circle behaviour) and confidentiality outside the circle. The teacher then starts by giving pupils a sentence to finish such as, “Today I feel... because…” Pupils should be given the option to ‘pass’ if they really don’t want to speak. The actual act of them passing involves speech and can give them confidence in the circle as a place that does not force them to speak but is
there when they feel ready. The more regularly you use circle time the more likely it will become that they will grow in confidence and take part. You may wish to place in one or two rounds depending on the size of the circle. Remember keep it short and snappy to avoid poor behaviour due to a breakdown in concentration, although avoid being rushed so the speech is given value by each individual and not seen as something to be done in a 'beat the clock' fashion.

Disciplining The Speaking

The circle should be disciplined in as non-confrontational manner as possible. The teacher can ask questions such as “Who is not listening to...?” “Who is interrupting...?” This will hopefully draw the gaze of the pupils to the individual encouraging them to stop. Having a soft object, which is handed around from speaker to speaker also makes it clearer who should be speaking and who not. One particularly difficult group responded very well to having a focus object. All I had to do was ask twice “Who is speaking without the hat?” and then the group started challenging that pupil (who liked to dominate discussions) with the very same question. I very much enjoyed not having to be the disciplinarian and it was much more effective for that pupil to have peer discipline correcting his behaviour. The other less dominant pupils felt able to set boundaries and he was unable to reject them by labelling them as 'the teacher's rules'. If all else fails pupils can be asked to leave the circle for a few moments. Care with your language should be taken. Curry and Broomfield advise that you use none confrontational language such as “Johnny you are stopping Tim from listening by doing that. You will have to stop or I'll take it you want to leave the circle.”. If the behaviour persists you might say “You are still disturbing Tim so I will take it you want to leave the circle for a few minutes.” The pupil can then take some time out outside while the circle discusses what Johnny will have to do be
allowed back in. When he tries comes back in or is called by the class, he should be reminded gently what the rule is “Are you ready to come back in and not distract Tim?” etc.

Building up good techniques of circle time discipline is something that is taking me time. There are many good books written upon it that see the circle as a deeply dynamic psychological tool, a place where ingrained behaviours can be challenged and overcome. You should not think you will master it in a day.

The Main Activities

There can be up to four main activities. The three essential things to remember are to ensure the activities are purposeful and the learning aims are made explicit to pupils. Secondly keep the activities snappy in terms of timing to avoid poor behaviour and thirdly end with a conference session where pupils build upon work done in smaller groups. I experimented with the circle technique within a series of lessons where we were decoding the meanings of famous stories. We looked at the story of the ‘Lost Son’ and this is how I structured the main session.

1. Reading the story then pupils splitting into two’s for two minutes to discuss the possible meanings of the story. We then conferenced on the meaning.
2. We split into groups of four with pieces of A3 paper. Pupils were asked to consider three questions.
   a) Why can it be hard for us to forgive?
   b) Are there any benefits to being forgiven or forgiving someone?
   c) What might you need in order to forgive?
3. With two pupils scribing the first two questions as brainstorm onto the white board (I set the class up so they could be incorporated), I asked each group to give us just one answer per question. If time allows you can ask them to think of an example to give with it.
4. Lastly, we ended with an open circle session that focused on our last question. If pupils felt they had something to add they put their hand up to receive the speaking object next.

The End Game

This is a good way to lighten the air after a focused session. Games such as wink murder, where the detective is sent out of the room and while the other pupils’ eyes are closed the teacher, or another pupil, chooses the murderer. The pupil outside then has three guesses to decide who the murderer is. It helps if you time the situation, insisting there is a murder and guess within a set time. The same sort of activity can be used to detect who is the pattern changer in the circle of people slapping their laps, stomping feet etc.
Differentiating Written Materials

Exams & Exam Preparation

Exciting and motivating pupils about exams and revision can be very difficult even more so when they have reading difficulties. Often reading problems have their roots within organisational, sequential and memory problems as well as visual problems with tracking etc. Exams are the area where these pupils have a history of failure, as they rely so heavily on proficiency in those areas mentioned, precisely where they are weakest. These pupils might find it hard to organise their original work, let alone a revision programme from scrappy and sometimes lost material. Poor short-term memory can make them feel like they are onto a loser when they revise, as they seem to forget so quickly afterwards. When they finally come to sit the exam, their difficulties spelling multi-syllabic words and a lack of reading practice in more challenging texts leaves them struggling to express their ideas. Rejection of the worth of exams, I have found, is a method such pupils learn to preserve their dignity and self-esteem. If it’s worthless they won’t miss not having it. Unfortunately our present school system has become obsessed by tests and examinations. For those who regularly achieve low results in exams this can seem like an ongoing punishment designed by schools and teachers to remind them how thick and unable they are.

Differentiating exams is therefore a complex issue and must be tackled by looking at both the big and small details of the assessment system you wish pupils to engage in. A failure to look at the big and small picture will create difficulties and possibly lead to less than satisfactory results. Over the next few pages I will look briefly at:

1. Formative assessment
2. Exams within a school context
3. Differentiating specific exams
4. Memory techniques and exam preparation
Formative Assessment

I find myself increasingly swayed by those who speak against exams and levelling in lower secondary schooling. For SEN pupils such a levelling system can be very negative. The head of RE at Lord Williams school in Thame commented that once you give a child a number they sadly became fixated on that and not on the constructive feedback you have given by the side. I have also found this to be true. Comparisons of levels are made with peers and for SEN pupils feelings of inadequacy can result. This is frustrating for a teacher trying to help the pupil see improvements in the work assessed. So often I have seen this sort of comparison lead pupils to refer to their own work as 'Rubbish' or 'Crap' when it actually shows great improvements.

Lord Williams School in Thame has adopted a 'Formative Assessment' style of marking and the head of RE reports pleasing results. This system engages the pupil in the assessment process. It asks them to focus on how they have progressed in comparison with previous work. It seeks to encourage pupils to become more independent and acquire increased ownership of their own learning process rather than rely on the teacher as target setter. Levelling can still be done and indeed is now compulsory according to some RE Agreed Syllabuses but perhaps only needs to be seen and recorded within the privacy of a teachers mark book.

Formative assessment can be made to work in a number of ways the following is only one method I have seen. Pupils are given a file and assessment work is logged within it in their years at school. When new pieces of assessment work are set, previous work is taken out and examined. Targets relating to previous work can then be drawn up by the pupil and developed in the new piece. The following sheet is an example of a feedback sheet I have seen.
RE Assessment Sheet

Outline of the task & its aims:

What you want to develop through this piece and how:

Pupil assessment:

Teacher assessment:

Possible future targets:
Selecting Exams

When differentiating exams a number of things should be considered.

1. The exam must be looked at within the context of the whole school system and the year-by-year assessment system within RE.

2. Does your exam system seek to build confidence and self-esteem for SEN pupils from year seven upwards? A sense of success in learning will help to store up good will and motivation for external exam and certification work.

3. Should you give SEN pupil’s tiered exams from year seven or should you build the differentiation into the one exam you give all pupils? A tiered exam might make pupils feel different and labelled. Whereas giving the same exam to all pupils will invariably lead to mark comparisons and possible feelings inadequacy.

4. Do you band or set pupils?

5. Are the public qualifications you have chosen appropriate to pupils’ level and do they allow progression to the next level of qualification if that is felt appropriate. At Wood Green School we switched to a board that offered a full course GCSE that dovetailed with short course and a certificate of achievement. This meant we could double enter pupils into certificate of achievement and short course. Pupils can became very engaged about decision to double enter and this element of choice can be a very motivating.

6. The content of any certification courses should contain material that can be easily related to the lives and emotional imaginations of the pupil. Some SEN pupils find it hard to grapple with concepts too far removed from their own sphere of experience. SEN pupils can think very deeply on philosophical and moral questions but I have found they do this best when those questions are related to their lives or the lives of other human beings. Many
SEN pupils have amazed me with their level of emotional sensitivity. We must use that in engaging and motivating them about their study. Recently ITN showed a moving programme about the last day in the life of a man travelling to Switzerland for Euthanasia. I have struggled for a long time to find video material that deals with this issue without being dry and overly philosophical for the pupils’ stage of development. This programme was very challenging. It engaged pupils at a deeply emotional level whilst asking them to consider some serious philosophical problems about suffering. The deeply moving personal account of the gentleman in question left them with a lasting memory and engagement with the topic. An exam syllabus needs to be able to provide topics that engage pupils on an emotional level whilst helping them to develop abstract philosophical thought.

Differentiating Individual Exams

Much can be learned from the excellent exams set by the Welsh Joint Examinations Board. They employ a number of tactics within their papers which I have found build confidence in SEN pupils and can lead them to greater success.

Beginnings

Seek to start your exam with easy questions that help build confidence and get the pupils going. You could start with a number of different methods.

1. Multiple choice questions
2. True or false questions
3. Sequencing tasks that involve cutting and sticking within the exam paper. Pupils might be asked to sequence a story they have learned such as ‘The Parable of the Sower’ or ‘Good Samaritan’.
4. Asking students to complete a piece of closed text about a story they have learned.
It may be wise to add in some of these exercises every now and then to maintain confidence and the feeling that they are gaining marks throughout the paper. This will help stop the pupil from giving up half way through.

**Other Features**

Once a student has started their exam and feels they have marks under their belt, you can begin to develop the complexity of the questions. Questions should:

1. **Have very clear language, focusing on one specific task.**
   Questions that ask multiple things all in one go, often do not work. The students answer the first part of the question and then forget the second half. It is far better to split questions into sub sections that occur after the pupil has completed the previous answer. This way SEN students are not being penalised for their poor short-term memory by losing marks for tasks left incomplete.

2. **Avoidance of too many multi syllabic, abstract words and long sentences should be a priority.**

3. **Questions could be accompanied by a meaningful graphic, which directly relates to the question.** Such graphics aid memory and help pupils identify the meanings of words if they find reading for meaning difficult.

4. **Question answers can be scaffolded for pupils by the answer space being broken up areas with sentence starters or key words starting them (see below).**

5. **Avoid overcrowding a page with writing.** Break the page up into sections using space, boxes and lines as well as bold and italic text to denote the ending of questions and sections.
Question 2 (parts A, B & C).

A). Describe 2 miracles that you have read about. One about Jesus' power over evil forces, and one about Jesus' power over sickness. (8 Marks)

Power over evil forces:

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Power over sickness:

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B). What hope may those miracles Jesus performed all those years ago give to Christians today? (7 Marks)

Hope1

Hope2

Hope3

Hope4
C). “God cannot heal everyone”.
Explain in your own words what Christians and other people may say when they read this quote.
*Try and give some modern examples that you have read about or seen on the TV. (5 Marks)

What would...

**Christians say?**

**Other non-Christians say?**
A Year 7 R.E. Exam.

God ?

Section A

Philosophy

1. St. Thomas Aquinas believed that:
   A. God existed;
   or
   B. God didn’t exist? [1 Mark]

2. St. Thomas Aquinas said there had to be a first ..................? [1 Mark]

3. Where was St. Thomas Aquinas from:
   A. Peru;
   B. Japan;
   C. Italy;
   D. Outer Mongolia? [1 Mark]

4. William Paley believed that:
   A. God existed;
   or
   B. God didn’t exist? [1 Mark]

5. What did William Paley say about a watch? [2 Marks]

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Revision and Memory

It can be very frustrating for teachers when students have almost completely forgotten the information and ideas you taught them only a few days before. Over the years I have overcome my despair as I have realised this is often not the students fault but the result of genuine memory problems that often make the pupils give up before they start in order to opt out of failure. “It’s because I can’t be bothered, not because I can’t.” Sensitivity to that fear and an understanding that their behaviours may just be a face saving exercise that they do not fully understand themselves, is essential.

So how can you overcome these problems?

Firstly, I have found it more helpful to treat it as natural for pupils to forget quite a lot within a very short amount of time. Avoiding blame for this helps both yourself and the pupil. Treating it as a natural occurrence gives us a valid reason for review. The importance of review has often become obscured within our present day overcrowded curriculum, where the main thrust is often directed at just getting through the material. Such a culture can be very difficult to cope with for students with memory problems and is something to bear in mind when selecting what exam type you enter students for.

Secondly, regular review of material is crucial and must be built into your schemes of work.

“... by regularly reviewing information, recall can be dramatically improved.” Hughes (2000, page 53).

Mike Hughes in his book ‘Closing The Learning Gap’, advises that information be reviewed in the class or through homework at least four times not including revision for exams.

“The review process must be repeated 24 hours later, and again after one week and after one month. A final review three months after the original learning experience will help cement
the new knowledge and information into the long-term memory." Hughes (2000, page 55).

The first review should always be done towards the end of the lessons tasks. The three key learning aims of the lesson should be focused on and pupils be made to record them in some way.

1. Record them in the back of their books in written or picture form.
2. Verbalise the key points to a neighbour.
3. Create a rhyme or mnemonic with the key words.

Mike Hughes recommends inserting a quick review task into each lesson, perhaps in a break between different activities. He recommends the review should be a maximum of five minutes long, as this short and snappy approach stops pupils from getting bored and makes them more willing to go over previously learned material. A regular occurrence of such reviews enables the students to become more proficient at them and will make them run more efficiently. A few methods I have tried are:

1. Stories (like ‘The Good Samaritan’) simplified into short statements, which can be cut up and placed into an envelope. Pupils can then, either on their own or as a pair, be asked to rearrange the statements into the correct order.
2. Pupils could be asked to complete a short multiple-choice test on a story or word meanings. The answers could be written into their books and marked by a friend, teacher or themselves.
3. Pupils could be given a small (quick) crossword or word search about a specific topic. For students who struggle greatly the answers to the crossword can be given on the sheet in a jumbled up form. You may think that would be of little use educationally but the student is being asked to recognise key words and put them together with a question so understanding is being asked for. The student
could gradually be weaned onto the crosswords without the answers on.

4. The student could be asked to explain the story or information to another student. The other student could be given a list of questions that the student has to try and answer. A second set could then be given so the roles could be reversed. Either way the student being tested and the one doing the testing will be reviewing the information. The fact that this activity is not done in front of the whole class will lessen the pressure and threat of embarrassment. Care should be taken with pupils with more profound memory problems who might get embarrassed even in front of one peer. Selection of an appropriate partner who will not use it as an excuse to put them down will be necessary.

5. Students can be given a prize if they are the first to write down all, or as many as they can of the...
   - Ten Commandments
   - Reasons for and against Euthanasia
   - Etc...

You could give a quick boiled sweet to everybody who gets over a certain number. Sweets cost money but a small boiled sweet once in a while for that difficult group can make them feel valued by being rewarded.

6. A quick closed text, with or without the words present by the side.
The Good Samaritan Quiz

1. Jesus told the 'Good Samaritan' story because somebody asked him a question. What was that question?
   a) Is racism ok?
   b) Who is my neighbour?
   c) Who is my friend?

2. What nationality was the mugged man?
   a) Samaritan?
   b) Jewish?
   c) Persian?

3. Who walked past the mugged man first?
   a) The Jewish Levite?
   b) The Jewish priest?
   c) The Samaritan?

4. Who was the next person to walk past?
   a) The Jewish priest?
   b) The Jewish Levite?
   c) The Samaritan?

5. Who helped the mugged man?
   a) The Jewish priest?
   b) The Samaritan?
   c) The Jewish Levite?

6. What did the man who helped him do?
   a) Ring for an ambulance and walk away?
   b) Tend to his cuts and wounds. Take him to an Inn and pay for his medical care?
   c) Give him a drink and a plaster?

7. Who was the neighbour according to Jesus?
   _____________________________

8. Why was it strange that Jesus made him the hero?
   _______________________________
Preparing for exams

Preparing SEN pupils for exams should be done in much the same way as pupils without special needs. It is crucial that pupils be given ongoing practice at question answering and clearly understand what different sections of a question are asking of them. You can prepare pupils by:

1. Answering past paper questions while you study each topic.
2. Give pupils model answers so that they can have some idea of what is expected.
3. Ask pupils to reword a model answer making it their own.
4. Give pupils a simplified mark scheme, two model answers, one bad and one good. Ask the pupils to mark them and then discuss as a class what makes a good answer.
5. For opinion questions such as ‘Euthanasia is another name for murder’, give the pupils a sorting activity of reasons for and against. Then allow the pupils to select the arguments they feel are most appropriate and that they can put in their own words with their own examples. This sort of activity will act as a review and help internalise the arguments as well as get them to know the structure of questions.
6. As your GCSE course progresses introduce and regularly practise timed questions. Time management is a difficult issue for some SEN pupils so regular practice is essential to avoid problems in the real exam.
7. Ensure the pupils have a few sessions where they are looking at and working through old papers. Getting to know the format will build confidence and help avoid pupils picking the wrong sections in the actual exams.
8. Give little sweets for those people who improve a grade. You may choose not to make this public as looking academic in front of their peers can be seen as bad for SEN pupils. Keep them back at the end and surprise them.
Your Opinion Part C

War is never justified.
Do you agree? (Give reasons and show you understand Christian ideas)

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Your Opinion Part C

War is never justified.  
Do you agree? (Give reasons and show you understand Christian ideas)

I believe that war is never justified because war causes loss of life. Every human is valuable and most have families who love them. I could not kill someone in a war as I would be thinking not only about the pain and suffering I put them through but also their family too. My father was bombed out during the war, his grandfather was also killed by a bomb. War causes massive pain due to loss of life.

War is also wrong as it is often started by leaders who should try to avoid war in the first place but are too stupid. The Second World War would never have happened if Allied leaders had not demanded so much money and land from Germany after the First World War. German people wouldn't have chosen a fascist like Hitler if they had not been desperate because they were broke and ruined. Our leaders could have prevented the Second World War but instead we had to fight it.

Some Christians say, “You should love your neighbour as you love yourself”. Jesus told the ‘Good Samaritan’ story where he made the enemy show great kindness to the Jew. I agree with these ideas. If we showed a little more love to poor countries then perhaps they would not want to support evil people like Osama Bin Laden. We can prevent a lot of wars if only we try and help some of these poor countries develop and be successful and then they will become friends and allies.
War is never justified.

Do you agree? (Give reasons and show you understand Christian ideas)

I think war is wrong as lots of people get killed and their ain’t no point as you can just use a nuclear bomb to take out someone like Saddam Hussein. We should try to live together peacefully although not with those terrorist geazers who did September 11th cos they are scum and should be shot. Jesus said we should love everyone and he was nice so why not listen to him.

Note: It is easier if you make the bad answer really bad so they can see the difference. Unfortunately I based this answer on one I received from a student.
Reasons For & Against Sex Before Marriage

Sort

• Sex before marriage is a good laugh and if both consent it harms nobody.

• Waiting till your married shows that you want them and not just their body.

• You can see if you’re sexually right together.

• Sex strengthens relationships so why not strengthen it before marriage?

• If you are both virgins when you marry it will mean that your relationship will be very different from any other you have ever had. It will be a very special relationship for you.

• If you wait till your married then you will both be beginners and the embarrassment will be on both sides. Neither partner will feel that the other is better as both will make mistakes.

• Sex can advance your career so why not do it when you like.

• Waiting until you are married means that any unplanned pregnancies will be within a marriage relationship. Christian teaching says marriage is the best place for raising kids.

• Modern contraceptives make pregnancy much less likely and reduce the fear of STD’s so sex outside of marriage is less risky now.

• You might compare your partner to a previous sexual partner and think they are not as good in bed. That might make you feel frustrated or tempt you into committing adultery.

• In Genesis Christians are told: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one flesh." God made sex as a gift for marriage and if you believe in God you should stick to the makers instructions to get the most out of it.

Note: I might reduce the amount of ideas for a class with more challenging needs. Pair sorting can also be very helpful.
Conclusion

I believe a key way to differentiate is by making your lessons and more importantly curriculum accessible to people with different learning styles and speeds. The predominantly literary focus of our present educational system, disregards the diverse ways research is discovering that people learn. As I write in 2003 the government is talking about widening the type of education we give to pupils, ideas echoed by Tomlinson in his ongoing review of Key stage four and five assessment structures. This, I feel, cannot come soon enough. Whilst many teachers are trying to cater for different learning styles and speeds of the children in their care, the curriculums we are asked to put most through aim directly towards an academic style of learning unsuitable to some who have to bear it. The ongoing low performance, negative self-image and low expectations they develop in terms of their educational abilities, is both damaging to them and our educational system.

I believe there is a need for fundamental change that recognises the importance of academic curriculums but also recognises that other practical, artistic and dramatic ways of learning and assessing must now be valued and catered for. It is about recognising the need and value of the different educational paths people might take, getting away from the idea that came with the 1988 National Curriculum that one size fits all and if not, it is the teachers job to make it fit. I hope this piece of work helps teachers differentiate in the situation as it is now but I also hope this short conclusion points to the need for more than one type of curriculum. I am deeply committed to the essential nature of RE for every pupil. I have total faith that if curriculums change RE can and will change with them, introducing moral and spiritual questioning to a new generation of pupils and introducing them to the rich diversity of cultures within our society today.
Bibliography


