

Developing oral feedback in religious education

Following the training in the generic unit *Oral feedback*, it is important to consider how the key messages of the training apply to religious education. As part of the whole-school focus on this, the following subject development material is intended to help you consider the key messages of the training unit and identify any areas requiring development in your department.

The following is a brief summary of the training unit.

Objectives

- To highlight how effective oral feedback develops pupils' learning.
- To consider a range of strategies for giving effective oral feedback that can be both formal and informal.
- To help teachers plan for giving effective oral feedback.
- To help schools develop a whole-school policy clarifying the relationship between oral and written feedback.

Key messages

- Oral feedback is the most regular and interactive form of feedback. It should be constructive and informative in order to help pupils take the next steps in their learning.
- It is both direct (targeted to individuals or groups) and indirect (others listen and reflect on what has been said). At times it will be spontaneous and at other times it should be planned.
- In offering oral feedback, the teacher is modelling the language that pupils can use in giving feedback to their teacher and peers.
- Oral feedback should be developmental. It should recognise pupils' efforts and achievements, and offer specific details of ways forward in relation to the shared learning objectives.
- Oral feedback about pupils' learning occurs in a range of situations on a continuum from the instant informal reply to more formally planned reviews.
- While focusing on specific areas of a response it is important to say when an answer is wrong to avoid confusion or reinforcing misconceptions.
- 'Wait-time' before and after questions or responses encourages pupils to consider and expand on their responses.

The following material builds on the tasks outlined in the 'Ready for more?' section of the *Oral feedback* training unit and it is intended for all those who teach religious education.

Reviewing existing practice in oral feedback

The table on page 3 provides a tool for a department to self-review current practice and to help identify an appropriate starting point.

As a department, agree and highlight the statements that best reflect the practice of the whole department. At the bottom of each column is a reference to the tasks that will support your current practice and provide the appropriate material to develop from this point.

Having completed this review you should read 'Making effective use of the subject development material' on page 4.

	Focusing	Developing	Establishing	Enhancing
Teachers	<p>There is no clear school or department policy on oral feedback.</p> <p>The subject leader has identified where teacher oral feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is informal, ad hoc and unplanned • tends to be teacher-led question-and-answer sessions or generalised comments to the class • does not target individual pupils • is unrelated to the learning objectives. <p>Teachers sometimes provide opportunities for pupils to discuss each other's work, but without reference to learning outcomes.</p>	<p>Departmental planning for oral feedback is becoming more focused on learning objectives and outcomes.</p> <p>Teachers are beginning to consider the role of different types of oral feedback.</p> <p>Teachers are beginning to use questions to probe progress against the learning objectives and outcomes to help pupils improve their work.</p> <p>Teachers are beginning to target specific individuals and groups of pupils for feedback in lessons.</p> <p>Teachers provide opportunities in lessons for pupils to provide feedback to their peers and for teachers to provide feedback to the pupils (in relation to learning outcomes).</p>	<p>The school is reviewing its marking policy to include oral feedback and departmental policy reflects this.</p> <p>Oral feedback is a focus of departmental planning and relates directly to the learning objectives and outcomes and helps clarify the next steps for pupils.</p> <p>Oral feedback opportunities are integral to medium- and short-term planning.</p> <p>Teachers use a varied repertoire of types of oral feedback.</p> <p>The teacher structures and models pupil oral feedback in relation to learning outcomes.</p>	<p>The school and department have a fully integrated assessment policy which values equally the importance of written and oral feedback.</p> <p>Planning for oral feedback at all levels, from full reviews to individual teachers' lessons, is an integral feature of departmental work across the school.</p> <p>Departments ensure that oral feedback from pupil to teacher, teacher to pupil and pupil to pupil forms part of a dialogue that relates directly to learning objectives and outcomes. The feedback provided is constructive and informative and enables pupils to take the next steps in their learning.</p>
Pupils	<p>The subject leader has identified lessons in which pupils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expect teacher feedback in the form of supportive encouragement • do not view oral feedback as an essential part of learning • judge oral feedback to be secondary to written feedback • offer comments on each other's work, but these lack clear focus and are usually unchallenging. 	<p>Most pupils expect feedback to relate to their learning and listen to and respond to what is said.</p> <p>Most pupils know when to expect specific oral feedback as a class, individually or in a small-group setting.</p> <p>Pupils are beginning to see oral feedback as having a distinct value.</p> <p>Most pupils are able to provide useful feedback to other pupils and similarly respond to feedback from their peers.</p>	<p>Pupils recognise fully the value of oral feedback and know it is related to their learning. They listen carefully and respond appropriately.</p> <p>Pupils recognise the strategies for different types of oral feedback.</p> <p>Pupils will readily engage in focused peer feedback, in relation to learning outcomes, and are beginning to develop a vocabulary to do this.</p> <p>Pupil work shows evidence of a response to oral feedback.</p>	<p>All pupils recognise that oral feedback is focused on their learning and is as important as written feedback.</p> <p>Pupils know that feedback is valuable and listen carefully to each other and their teachers. They respond to feedback to engage in dialogue about their learning.</p> <p>Pupils understand well-established strategies for group and guided work that involve feedback.</p> <p>Pupils give regular detailed oral feedback related to learning objectives and outcomes to peers and teachers.</p> <p>Pupils are clear where in their work they have improved in response to feedback.</p>
	Start with Task 4.1A	Start with Task 4.1A	Start with Task 4.1B	Start with Task 4.1B

Making effective use of the subject development material

The tasks you have been referred to are intended to support the development or extension of oral feedback in religious education and provide guidance on how to embed this into regular practice in religious education lessons.

The results of the self-review will have suggested the appropriate task(s) that will support your department's development needs.

To make best use of the supporting material the following sequence will be helpful.

1 Read the task and the supporting exemplification.

This describes how a department has approached the task and worked through each of its stages. It is given as an *example* of how the task might be addressed. It is not intended that you follow this approach, which is given as a guide to the process that will support improvements in your subject.

2 Identify what the department did and the impact it had on pupils.

Discuss as a team the example provided and establish the key areas that helped to develop this practice and the impact it had on pupils. It will be helpful to identify the changes in teachers' practice and how these impacted on pupils' learning.

3 Agree and plan the actions that will develop your practice.

As a department, agree how you intend to approach this task. Clarify what you are focusing on and why. The example given will act as a guide, but be specific about which classes, which lessons and which aspects of the curriculum will be your points of focus.

4 Identify when and how you will evaluate its impact on pupils.

The purpose of focusing on this is to improve pupils' achievement and attainment in religious education. You will need to be clear on what has helped pupils to learn more effectively in your subject. Part of this will be how your practice has adapted to allow this. You should jointly identify what has worked well and which areas require further attention.

5 Having evaluated these strategies, consider what steps are required to embed this practice.

You will need to undertake an honest evaluation of what you have tried and the impact it has had on your teaching and on pupils' learning. One outcome might be that you need to spend longer on improving this area or you may be in a position to consider the next task.

Other departments in the school will have been focusing on this area and you should find out about the progress they have made.

You may find that some teachers in the department will require further time to develop and consolidate new practice, while others will be ready to progress further through the tasks in this area (while continuing to support their colleagues). Practice across a department will need to be consolidated before focusing on a new area of Assessment for learning.

The subject development tasks

Task 4.1A

With a colleague, observe each other teaching and, ideally, record (video/audio) the lessons. Use **handout 4.1.4** and **slide 4.1.5** in the generic unit (see **appendix 4.1A.1**) to record how specific and positive individual pieces of feedback are perceived to be. You should mark a cross in the relevant quadrant to record how positive/negative and specific/non-specific each example of oral feedback is during the lessons.

The scatter of the plotted points will give an overall impression of the nature of the oral feedback and highlight particular development needs for the teacher observed.

Capture specific examples of oral feedback recorded in each quadrant to inform your joint review of the lesson. It is important to focus on the effective practice of the teacher observed before agreeing areas for improvement and how to go about doing this.

Task 4.1B

Refer to **handout 4.1.4** in the generic unit (see **appendix 4.1A.1**) and, as a department, 'traffic light' the types of oral feedback described, e.g.:

- green = frequently used across the department
- amber = occasionally used by individuals
- red = rarely used.

Select an area highlighted amber or red that the department agrees is most likely to impact on learning outcomes.

As a department, plan and teach lessons that incorporate the selected type of oral feedback.

Jointly review the impact of this on pupils' learning.

The following pages provide exemplification of each task.

Task 4.1A

With a colleague, observe each other teaching and, ideally, record (video/audio) the lessons. Use handout 4.1.4 and slide 4.1.5 in the generic unit (see appendix 4.1A.1) to record how specific and positive individual pieces of feedback are perceived to be. You should mark a cross in the relevant quadrant to record how positive/negative and specific/non-specific each example of oral feedback is during the lessons.

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Context

The two specialist RE teachers in a department reflected on some recent lesson observations undertaken by the school leadership team. These identified the positive relationships that both teachers had with their pupils.

Pupils had also commented how much they enjoyed RE lessons. In the feedback to them it was discussed that, as for many other subjects in the school, oral feedback to individuals, groups and classes could be more specific in highlighting to pupils what they had done well and what steps they could take to improve their response or work further. The teachers were also aware that the attainment of pupils in RE at the end of Key Stage 3 was often lower when compared with other subjects.

Process

To gain a more detailed picture in their own teaching of the nature and quality of their oral feedback to pupils in lessons, teachers agreed to observe and do an audio recording of each other teaching. During the observations the teachers used **handout 4.1.4** to record how positive and specific the feedback to pupils was. A cross was marked on the handout as the feedback occurred in the lesson. The audio recording was used afterwards as a way of referencing the marks on the handout.

Evaluation

The pattern that emerged for both teachers was that in the vast majority of cases feedback was positive (see **appendix 4.1A.1**). Where feedback was negative, it often related to a small group of pupils who were not concentrating. Seating arrangements were reconsidered to avoid this. The observing teacher shared the completed version of **handout 4.1.4** and commented that while the nature of the feedback was mainly positive, it often did not specify why or provide any way forward for the pupils.

An example was: 'Thanks Paul, that was a really clear answer.' The teacher observing commented that while this was a positive comment, more use could be made of responses from pupils to guide other pupils in improving the quality of response. In context, it would have been better if the response had been: 'Thanks, Paul. Using direct quotes from the text made that a really clear answer.' Further examples of comments can be found in **appendix 4.1A.2**.

Both teachers recognised the need to avoid being formulaic about their feedback, but to attempt to capitalise on the feedback they both gave and received. They adopted two main strategies for this. The first was to ensure they were more explicit to pupils in lessons explaining why an answer was deemed to be good. The second was to use one pupil's answer to focus other pupils, determining why it was a good answer or how it could be improved. In trialling these strategies, one of the teachers commented after a few lessons that she was conscious pupils needed more 'training' in the skill of explaining the quality of other pupils' answers, and that there was a need to invest time in modelling this for pupils.

Task 4.1B

Refer to **handout 4.1.4** in the generic unit (see appendix 4.1A.1) and, as a department, 'traffic light' the types of oral feedback described, e.g.:

- green = frequently used across the department
- amber = occasionally used by individuals
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Select an area highlighted amber or red that the department agrees is most likely to impact on learning outcomes.

As a department, plan and teach lessons that incorporate the selected type of oral feedback.

Jointly review the impact of this on pupils' learning.

Context

Following the whole-school training on *Oral feedback*, the RE department (along with all other departments) were asked to consider the quality of oral feedback in their subject and what areas might require improvement.

Process

They used **handout 4.1.4** to focus this discussion and help them to identify the types of oral feedback employed by the teachers and their frequency of use.

Using the traffic light system, staff were able to identify areas of oral feedback that were commonly used and those that needed to be developed. During their discussion it was recognised that oral feedback in RE, both planned and instant, often provided teachers with the opportunity to identify and address misconceptions. For example, pupils commonly confused the concept of resurrection with that of reincarnation and life after death. Whole-class oral feedback was identified as a key strategy for improving pupils' understanding and ability to provide explanations.

Department teachers were aware that whole-class oral feedback should be structured and built into planning. Two non-specialist members of the department expressed some difficulties they had faced giving whole-class oral feedback.

On occasions they felt they had made assumptions on faith membership within their classrooms. It was agreed that the use of inclusive language – e.g. 'we' when referring to a particular religious group – should be avoided. The whole department agreed that this was an issue they could work on as a team, being aware that within their classrooms they needed to be sensitive and aware of the faith and ethnic backgrounds of pupils.

As a result of this exercise the department acknowledged that they felt secure in providing general whole-class feedback, but felt that insufficient opportunities were planned to provide focused feedback to groups. They had given this ‘amber’ on **handout 4.1.4**. It was common practice across the department to provide pupils with the learning objectives and intended learning outcomes for the lesson and unit of work. While it was common to focus the class through questioning and feedback on the objectives and outcomes, teachers recognised that this could be built on by following up more specifically in small group situations. This was particularly important as the department saw each Key Stage 3 class only once per week.

Evaluation

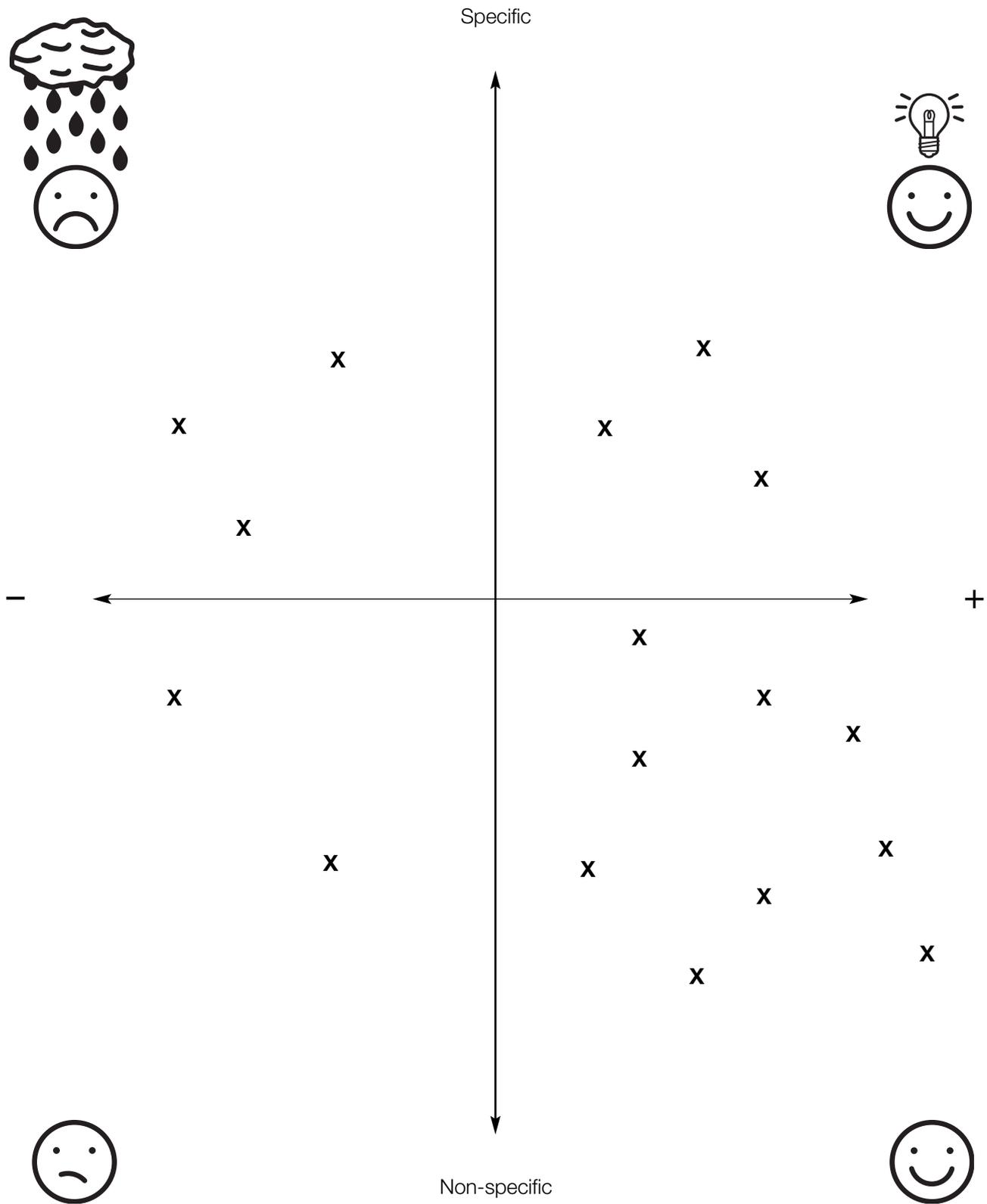
The department trialled the approach and set aside time to review the impact on their lessons. The lesson plan in **appendix 4.1B.1** outlines where one of the teachers had planned more specifically for oral feedback opportunities in the lesson. This identifies, in bold type, the range of planned oral feedback opportunities in the lesson, with one element being to groups.

The head of department also interviewed a small number of pupils after a few weeks to determine to what extent it had impacted on them. The feedback from pupils indicated that they valued feedback that was immediate and specific to them as individuals. Inevitably, the nature of some of the feedback was common to a number of individuals in the class, but as the written comment was personalised this was not conveyed in the written comment. It was noted by the teachers that specific feedback to both the whole class and small groups made pupils more focused and motivated.

This approach helped to support the targets that had been set with pupils, but were proving difficult to manage on an individual level. This approach allowed the teacher to establish a focus with a group and set targets that could be more easily monitored by both the teacher and pupil.

RE-specific example of handout 4.1.4

Oral feedback



<p>Specific negative</p> <p>‘That was disappointing because you’ve not included an explanation as to why Lourdes is an important Christian place of pilgrimage.’</p> <p><i>Improved to:</i> ‘You have given me some details about Lourdes as a place of pilgrimage. To improve your work you could give an explanation as to why Lourdes is an important Christian place of pilgrimage.’</p> <p>‘That’s a poor description of the Seder meal, because you’ve not included the essential keywords, such as “Pesach”, “Haggadah” and “Afikomen”.’</p> <p><i>Improved to:</i> ‘You’ve given an outline of some aspects of the Seder meal. It would be better if you used some of the keywords like “Pesach”, “Haggadah” and “Afikomen” in your description.’</p> <p>‘Your evaluation was weak. You included arguments for the existence of God, but where were the arguments against the existence of God?’</p> <p><i>Improved to:</i> ‘Well done. You included arguments for the existence of God. You could balance this by giving me the arguments against the existence of God and then by saying what your view is.’</p>	<p>Specific positive</p> <p>‘Really good! You’ve given a detailed description of the rituals undertaken by a pilgrim at Lourdes. To improve your work in the future you should include explanations as to why rituals are performed and why they are important to a pilgrim.’</p> <p>‘This is a really interesting piece of work on the celebration of Pesach. You gave a clear and concise account of the order of Seder and also showed me that you understand some of the symbolism. I’d like you to explain to me why this celebration is relevant for Jews today.’</p> <p>‘A well-constructed evaluation giving arguments both for and against the existence of God. It would be even better if you gave direct quotes from the sacred texts to support your answer. Can you give me at least one?’</p>
<p>Non-specific negative</p> <p>‘A disappointing piece of work on pilgrimage; you could do better.’</p> <p><i>Improved to:</i> ‘You have succeeded in using the words “pilgrim” and “pilgrimage” in your description. To make further progress you need to show that you understand why people make a pilgrimage.’</p> <p>‘Your description of the Seder meal was poor.’</p> <p><i>Improved to:</i> ‘You have outlined two features of the Seder meal. In order to improve your work you need to include details about the symbols of the Seder meal.’</p> <p>‘Insufficient detail given in your evaluation of the arguments for the existence of God.’</p> <p><i>Improved to:</i> ‘You have given your opinion about the existence of God. To improve your work you need to give the arguments of both believers and non-believers.’</p>	<p>Non-specific positive</p> <p>‘Good work. A well-written account of a pilgrimage to Lourdes.’</p> <p><i>Improved to:</i> ‘This is a well-written account of a pilgrimage to Lourdes, making good use of the keywords asked for. To improve your work you need to include an explanation stating why Lourdes is important to many Christians.’</p> <p>‘A good description of the Seder meal.’</p> <p><i>Improved to:</i> ‘Your description of the Seder meal was good because you included the symbolic meanings of the foods. Including the meanings of keywords like “Haggadah” and “Afikomen” would make it even better. Can you tell me about Haggadah first?’</p> <p>‘An interesting evaluation of the arguments for the existence of God.’</p> <p><i>Improved to:</i> ‘An interesting evaluation of the existence of God. Include appropriate evidence to support the views you have given.’</p>

Is Pesach a relevant festival for Jewish people today?

<p>Learning objectives (We are learning to ...)</p> <p>Investigate the ways in which Jewish beliefs and lifestyles relate to historical events. Identify the symbols of Pesach. Explain how and why these symbols have meaning for Jewish people today.</p>	<p>Learning outcomes (What I'm looking for ...)</p> <p>Identify the main historical events and characters of the Passover and the Exodus from Egypt. Use the correct keywords to explain the meaning of the symbols of Pesach. Describe the way in which Pesach is celebrated today. Show that you have thought about the key question from the standpoint of a Jew and from your own standpoint.</p>
<p>Introduction</p> <p>The 'big picture' is given in the form of the key question: 'Is Pesach a relevant festival for Jewish people today?' Learning objectives and outcomes displayed.</p>	
<p>Starter (groups of three)</p> <p>Reference prior learning. Pupils are asked to make a list of about 15 words linked with Pesach. After 5 minutes groups are asked to identify any groups or categories that emerge from these words. Oral feedback is given by teacher and pupils to whole class suggesting and confirming categories, e.g. history. Teacher gives oral feedback to whole class to clarify any misconceptions, e.g. involvement of key characters – Joseph was a key figure but not present at the time of the Plagues. Reference is made to previous learning.</p>	
<p>Learning activities</p> <p>Class is divided into groups to consider contemporary and historical resources from an assortment of the following: Seder artefacts, The Four Questions and The Haggadah, the Chief Rabbi's 'Thought for the day' 11 April 2003 relating to Passover and Freedom; web material 'Passover from a Rabbi's perspective'; the words of the Passover song 'One little goat'; examples of contemporary and classical art depicting the Exodus, photographs of modern-day refugees. Teacher models through planned oral feedback how sources are evaluated. Some of the examples provided are explored and the teacher makes an oral response to the relevance of the source to the key question. Groups work independently, following the model exposed by the teacher, to determine the relevance of the source material in answering the key question. Groups are encouraged to formulate their own questions to seek clarification. Instant oral feedback is given by teacher to each group. Positive and specific feedback is given which provides clarification, helps pupils to reflect, encourages exploration of the sources and aids the development of their own questions. During feedback the teacher continually refers to the lesson objectives, which keeps the pupils focused and on track to achieve the learning outcomes. Teacher gives instant feedback to whole class including drawing attention to positive examples and encouraging pupils to respond to these with their own comments and ideas. This is used to inform individual thinking and learning. Envoys are sent from each group to retrieve information and report back their findings. This oral feedback, pupil to pupil, helps pupils produce an informed response to the key question drawing on information researched by other groups.</p>	
<p>Plenary</p> <p>Teacher poses the question: 'What connections are there between Jewish practice today and the Passover and Exodus?' In groups pupils explore their response to the question. Members prompt one another to elaborate and justify responses. The teacher conscripts pupils from targeted groups to feedback to whole class on strategies used to help formulate a response to the key question. Through careful planning the teacher draws upon the successful strategies employed, highlighting those which are most effective in such an exercise. The teacher uses the pupil feedback to assess the metacognition that has taken place to inform future planning.</p>	