

Diocese of Salford RE in EYFS: dynamic, playful, deep and driven by curiosity, can our RE be more fun, mind opening and thoughtfully creative?



By the end of the Reception year, we want children to have had opportunities to...

By the end of age phase pupils will be able to:
Listen to and talk about religious stories and respond to what they hear with relevant comments.
Sing songs, make music and dance to express religious stories.
Use a variety of materials, tools and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function to express religious stories.
Represent their own ideas, thoughts and feelings about religious stories through design and technology, art, music, dance and role play.
Develop their own narratives and explanations of religious stories by connecting ideas or events to the scripture source used.
Read and understand simple sentences from scripture or from their own religious stories.
Share religious stories they have heard and read with others.
Listen, talk about and role play similarities and differences in relation to places they have read or heard about family, church communities and religious stories.
Write simple sentences about religious stories using phrases or words which can be read by themselves and others.
Listen, talk about and role play how people act in a particular way because of their beliefs.
Listen and talk about key figures in the history of the People of God.
Listen, talk about and role play how people behave in the local, national and universal church community.
Listen and talk about the Sacraments. Use religious signs and symbols in role play.
Decode key religious words appropriate to their age and stage of development.
Use key religious words appropriate to their age and stage of development.

Answer 'how' and 'why' questions about their experiences and in response to religious stories or events.
Show sensitivity to others' needs and feelings.
Talk about how they and others show feelings.
Confidently speak in a familiar group and talk about their ideas.
Express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners' needs.
Give their attention to what others say and respond appropriately.
Talk about their own and others' behaviour and its consequences.
Talk about past and present events in their own lives and in the lives of family members.
Know that other children don't always enjoy and share the same feelings and are sensitive to this.

Persona dolls Learning Christianity with Persona Dolls

Helen Jones teaches at Oxton Saint Saviour's school on the Wirral. She shares her learning journey with persona dolls as aids to teaching Christianity.

I started using Persona Dolls after we introduced Understanding Christianity at school to complement our diocesan syllabus. One of the recommendations is to introduce the persona doll characters of Tom and Tessa as friends who visit the foundation classroom. Tom and Tessa always arrive with a bag of props to introduce your theme.

As it was the spring term, I used this idea to introduce Palm Sunday. Tom and Tessa brought their back pack into the classroom and showed the children a Palm Cross, a paper palm branch, a donkey costume and nativity tunics, a streamer and a children's Bible. The children recognised all of the items and those that attend their own church knew about Palm Crosses. We read the Palm Sunday story and went outside to re-enact it. We all cheered and shouted, "Hosanna!" The Palm Sunday story was very well understood and most children were able to recall the key events. However, what I hadn't expected was the interest in Tom and Tessa. I was bombarded with questions. Where do they live? Why don't they come to school every day? How old are they? All the kinds of things you would want to know about new friends.

I started reading up about using Persona Dolls and one suggestion is that you keep a diary about their adventures. I tweaked this idea and made a scrap book all about Tom and Tessa. I created a fictional home for them in New Brighton, which is an area close to school but not actually where school is or where the children live, yet familiar enough for them to have had days out there. I created a family for Tom and Tessa, devised interests for them and created a page of 'things I like' including swimming certificates, brownie badges etc. I based their church activities on my own church and so a context, or persona, was created for our fictional friends.

At the beginning of the next academic year my first RE sessions were spent solely introducing Tom and Tessa through short circle time type activities. Tom and Tessa came with their back pack and their special book and we looked at different pages each time and followed up with discussions about our families, our favourite food (Tom and Tessa love pizza!), birthdays and hobbies. Each time we revisited previous pages from the book. Discussion was very animated and enthusiastic.

In using Tom and Tessa we invite friends into the classroom much as you would invite the vicar or other visitor. They become the specialists and as we unpack the backpack our theme is slowly revealed.



One of the most effective sessions I had was when considering forgiveness and saying sorry. When Tom and Tessa came to school Tessa didn't want us to look in her bag because it contained a broken toy which belonged to Tom. She had broken it and had a worried tummy. The children suggested ways to help Tessa and very naturally told her she should say sorry. Someone else suggested a hug and then Tom said I forgive you.

Previously, when teaching this theme, I have found that the children struggle to relate saying sorry to themselves. Tom and Tessa helped them to develop greater empathy and I began to hear children saying sorry to each other and more unusually, "that's ok. I forgive you."

Most of my sessions are ways into exploring Christian concepts, good news, incarnation, forgiveness, creation, Christian Community and the Holy Spirit. These link into big questions and our work is recorded in large floor books. Photographs of Tom and Tessa appear in the floor books and many of our circle time discussions are recorded on post-its either by myself or my TA showing the learning process and recording the children's responses. (As the year progresses, I encourage the children to write their own responses.) The dolls are a very effective way of promoting discussion and of capturing the religious understanding of our youngest pupils but it is important to remember that they are visitors and not puppets. I never put on 'a voice' but rather suggest what the dolls are saying. Their voices are 'heard' as the artefacts in their bag are revealed.

Anyone who uses a story sack or feely bag to develop learning will be very comfortable with this style of teaching but I would encourage anyone using persona dolls to develop a scrapbook about the characters. I found that this evolved as I saw what was needed for each theme and the children love returning

to previous pages which also allows a quick recap of previous learning. The props are easy to gather and are mainly familiar to the children. Unfamiliar items extend learning and invite questions, all good skills for developing religious enquiry!

Helen Jones



RE can be taught through all areas of the curriculum, developing children's key skills and knowledge through the following possible opportunities.

Prime area: Communication and Language. RE enables children to:

- Develop their spoken language through quality conversation in a language-rich environment, gaining new vocabulary about religion and worldviews
- Engage actively with stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems from the RE field, taking opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts
- Share their ideas via conversation, story-telling and role play, responding to support and modelling from their teacher, and sensitive questioning that invites them to elaborate their thoughts in the RE field
- Become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures in relation to RE content.
- Offer explanations and answers to 'why' questions about religious stories, non-fiction, rhymes, songs and poems.

Prime area: Personal, Social and Emotional Development. RE enables children to:

- Observe and join in warm and supportive relationships with adults and learn how to understand their own feelings and those of others
- Manage emotions and develop a positive sense of self, understanding their own feelings and those of others e.g. through religious story
- Talk and think about simple values as they learn how to make good friendships, co-operate and resolve conflicts peaceably
- Notice and respond to ideas about caring, sharing and kindness from RE content including stories, sayings and songs.

Prime area: Physical Development. RE enables children to:

- Use and develop their motor skills through RE based arts and craft activities and, for example, small world play, visual representations of their ideas and thoughts, role play

Specific area: Literacy. RE enables children to:

- Build their abilities in language comprehension through talking with adults about the world around them, including the world of religion and belief
- Engage with stories and non-fiction in RE settings and enjoy rhymes, poems and songs together.
- Build their skills in RE-related word reading, recognizing religious words and discovering new vocabulary in relation to religions and worldviews
- Articulate ideas and use RE examples to write simple phrases or sentences that can be read by others.

Specific area: Mathematics. RE enables children to:

- Develop their spatial reasoning skills, noticing shape, space and measures in relation to RE content
- Look for patterns and relationships and spot connections, sorting and ordering objects simply.

Specific area: Understanding the World. RE enables children to:

- Make sense of their physical world and their community, e.g. on visits to places of worship, or by meeting members of religious communities
- Listen to a broad selection of stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems to foster understanding of our culturally, socially and ecologically diverse world.
- Extend their knowledge and familiarity with words that support understanding of religion and belief
- Talk about the lives of people around them, understanding characters and events from stories.
- Know some similarities and differences between different religious and cultural communities in this country, drawing on their experiences and what has been read and experienced in class.
- Explore the natural world around them making observations of animals and plants, environments and seasons, making space for responses of joy, wonder, awe and questioning.

Specific area: Expressive Arts and Design. RE enables children to:

- Develop artistic and cultural awareness in relation to RE materials in relation to art, music, dance, imaginative play, and role- play and stories to represent their own ideas, thoughts and feelings.
- Build their imagination and creativity by exploring and playing with a wide range of media and materials using RE content, responding in a variety of ways to what they see, hear, smell, touch and taste.
- See, hear and participate in a wide range of examples of religious and spiritual expression, developing their understanding, self-expression, vocabulary and ability to communicate through the arts.
- Create work drawing from religions and beliefs with a variety of materials and tools, sharing their creations and explaining the meaning of their work.
- Adapt and recount religious stories inventively, imaginatively and expressively, and sing, perform and learn from well-known songs in RE imaginatively and expressively.

Early Years RE

**Provocations: lots of ideas
early learning RE.**

Emma Pobjoy

Pastures Way is a nursery school in Luton, a town rich in religious diversity. In a town of diversity teaching of religious studies is important but even more essential is teaching of acceptance. In the early years these come hand in hand. We with a clear message to our youngest children that different people believe different things and that's OK. This is reinforced through our values curriculum which teaches love, companionship and belief.



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start

Providing opportunities for talk, exploration, experiences, visits, storytelling and creativity the excitement of celebrations and the familiarity of a home religion to children can be an excellent tool in developing learning. Examples of learning can range from learning in the moment to planned specific learning.

Celebrations and festival are a prime time to support learning about religions. At Christmas as well as joining in with all the fun celebrations, story telling is an invaluable tool to learn about Christianity, as it is about Islam and Hindu communities, for example during Diwali the children looked at artefacts from the Hindu religion and then made divas out of clay.

At other times learning can be much more organic. Recently I watched a practitioner playing alongside children in the block play and construction area, a child chose to make a church out of the blocks, this lead to looking at photos of churches, talking about what happens in church and finally leading to a discussion about Christianity and some of the ways of life of Christians - for example one child explained that they go to church every Sunday and what happens there: an important opportunity to link their life at home and school.

Across the nursery there are many ways to integrate RE, our favorite and most effective is through using provocations. Provocations inspire children and encourage them to engage. The great thing is they are simple and can range from stories, photos or artefacts to do with any religion of choice. The great thing about provocations is that they are open ended and give practitioners opportunity to introduce children to different religions at their pace of exploration. Provocations provide an amazing way to engage children, create language rich experiences and impact learning about specific religions. Our photo record of these kinds of learning opportunities speaks for itself. From books, stories and artefacts to dressing up and playing with puppets, RE can be found in a hundred different ways in early learning.

Emma Pobjoy, Headteacher, Pastures Way Nursery School, Luton



Emma Pobjoy's approach to EYFS RE is all about play, experience, child-initiated learning and curiosity. This set of approaches will work for Christianity and for diversity.



Christmas picture: in the church. Blow it up to A3 or A2 and use it with groups to frame conversations



Choose a favourite.

RE is interested in big questions and ideas. Also in every child developing their personal perspective. How shall we do this?

10 Ideas: How to make RE more playful for young learners

We asked some of the best 4-7 RE practitioners we know about play in RE. Do we need more playful RE? How can we make sure there is good religious content to very open ended learning? Are the children expert in play, and if so, do we make enough of that expertise? Which 3 might you try? Are there some you'd never do?

Claire Rivers, Head Teacher at St Mark's School in East Sussex gets us started:

"The new Early Years guidance from the Department for Education, 'Development Matters' (2013) has play as a one of the key areas in the 'Characteristics of Effective Learning' and I believe it is through play that children make sense of the world in which they live, starting with the known and moving into exploration of the unknown. In my teaching and leading of RE I have encouraged that approach regardless of age- to begin with the known and move into the unknown in order to make good connections in learning and to ensure there is understanding. Play enables multisensory experiences and high quality personalised learning.

Through role play children can explore relationships, cultures, faiths and attitudes, key themes in RE. By playing collaboratively and cooperatively, with expert adult interaction, children will develop respect, a set of values and communication skills." Claire gave us the first of our ten practical ideas for playful RE too:

1. Making dens, always fun: Sukkoth at school
At Harvest time the children were able to explore natural materials and construction through the building of Sukkahs. The range of designs varied greatly and some were more successful than others but learning through playing is all about experimentation, making connections, negotiating with others, discussion and questioning. I am always delighted when children ask questions, challenge and are prepared to listen to the views of others, which play opportunities provide. I have found that the role of the adults working with the children in their play is of key importance as they will help to take the play forward through expert interaction, questioning and challenge.

2. Duplo: the House on the Rock. Lego: making temples

Rebecca works at St. Chad's Primary School, and her head teacher Dominic Brown sent this example of her playful RE: "She's a great fan of using 'Small World' figures and environments for children to re-enact aspects of the stories from the gospels and some parables of Jesus. The children are able to role-play, use voices, create dialogue and basically, this helps them to empathise more strongly with the characters/dilemmas in the stories. Rebecca's

been on play-based RE because of the fact that the learning isn't didactic and is more informal: the children can run with it, explore it, extend and expand it - as it's dealing with people and situations rather than imprecise concepts. We're fond of Lego also! Children worked together to build the Temple for Jesus to throw out the money lenders! Younger ones have been building duplo houses for the 'House on the Rock' parable.

3. Divali in the forest, with marshmallows

Our 7-8 year olds have just completed a learning journey based on 'Festivals of Light' and most of their learning was play based giving the children the opportunity to play with and explore stories, cookery, art and crafts and poetry. As with all outstanding personalised learning, which I see as a tree, the staff plan the 'trunk' of the tree, which is displayed for children to see, and the children are encouraged to take the learning off into their own 'branches'. The children planned independently a special celebration to be shared with parents, carers and friends which was to be held in our own SMILE (St Mark's Ideal Learning Environment- named by a child) Meadow. It's an acre and three quarters of meadow, woods and stream. The Meadow was to be lit with individually designed diva lamps with a bonfire, toasted marshmallows and hot chocolate with poetry readings linked to movement. I love it when RE is shared with the community in this way when the power of nature and aesthetic experience linked to the play of the children bring us all together in a very special way which more formal RE would never do.

4. School twinning with a playful RE dimension: rules and justice

Dominic also reports: "We've had a big whole school 'Fair Play' project with our partner school in Tanzania. Children from County Durham have been sharing our playground games and thinking about 'rules' and 'justice'. When our visit to their school took place, we saw what they do at play times: the children took part in different activities. We'd been able to send them some footballs, and when we had shown the children how to pump them up and much to the children's delight then organised a football match with medals being given to the winning team. Other children played games and sang songs together.

5. The Small World Nativity

Donna Nagy works at Canon Evans CE Infant School, Warwickshire. She's been playing around as well...

"Children did a 'Small World' play session in a builder's tray, to make the Nativity. Over the years we've used a variety of things for the characters. One year we had Duplo figures for the characters in the story, another time we made dolly pegs into Mary, Joseph, an Innkeeper, Shepherds and wise men, with the children choosing swatches of fabric for the clothes, and drawing faces with sharpie pens. We used sand, gravel and the stones that go in fish tanks for the terrain. The stable was easy to make from some boxes. The children chose to use lollypop sticks for sheep pens!

We regularly do small world for other aspects of the life of Jesus. We have had gospel small world versions of Jesus in the wilderness, Palm Sunday, Good Friday and rising from the dead."

6. A Role Play Church.

Donna continues: "After exploring All Saints church in Bedworth we have both indoor and outdoor role play areas as a church. This area really takes off after we've had an enactment of a wedding and baptism for our reception children as the children then act out their experiences in the role play area. Over the years we've been doing this children have acted out Christmas and Easter services which we attend at All Saints and Sunday School experiences as well. Baskets of props are good, the children use these to develop their play. Amongst things we've found children playing with are Bibles and crosses in dens ("it's a church. It's a quiet place to talk to God"). Once, I noticed the children wading across a large piece of blue fabric, escaping from Pharaoh's armies! We need more play based RE: as well as promoting RE, play develops personal and social skills and communication skills including expanding vocabulary. Most of all play is fun!"

7. Story Sacks of Key Stories: take them home and talk about God at home!

Deborah Boldero, from Cawston VC Primary School in Norfolk, suggested these playful ideas. "We're not claiming these ideas are original, but they are workable. We like using Godly Play: story sacks with characters and artefacts about the book, and 'wondering questions' to keep children thinking. Our newest one in reception is 'The Lion and St Andrew.' In the story sack there is a lion, a map, a purse, a miniature harp, and some post cards. One thing that works well is that the children take these sacks home to share with parents and re-enact the story using the prompts. This is a way of reinforcing the message through the relaxed medium of

storytelling. Many Bible stories lend themselves to this technique, though it needs preparation to collect the items. We think these could be developed into drama and role play in class, when the sacks are available for child-led learning opportunities.

8. Clay Crosses and Play Doh Fonts

"We make fun use of modelling materials to recreate artefacts, e.g. from our church visit, making a play-dough font. It is an easier medium for young children to make things that look realistic, which they enjoy. Being tactile & physical makes the learning more memorable. Construction kits can also be used for e.g. making a stable, building an ark." Editor adds: why not a play doh 'Seven Days of Creation' or 'Visit to the Gurdwara' or 'Three scenes from the Parable of the Lost Sheep.'

9. Dress the doll, tell the faith story

"We like dressing dolls we have made out of pipe-cleaner or peg dolls. We help children to make cut out "clothes" to create characters from faith stories. It's good to see how this enables children to practise and improvise language in informal settings, with others. These play-based activities are good because of their informality and adaptability to the level & interests of the children. Because they are fluid they can be replayed many times & thereby reinforcing the potential learning. We like the idea of more play based learning, in any subject: it must be good when the children are less aware of the pressure to achieve and the enjoyment factor is high."

10. Rough and tumble in RE: wrestling play

The editor's addition: is there any reception class teacher who is brave - or stupid - enough to notice and build a lesson from the presence of wrestling in faith stories? Jacob wrestles with an angel, Sumo wrestling begins in Shinto tradition, Saint Paul says we wrestle with an unseen enemy. There's an Hadith of the Prophet about Muhammad wrestling for sport (he won). Could it be good to plan some controlled wrestling, not least because boys love to wrestle. Use a mat, agree the rules and watch carefully to make sure anger doesn't overwhelm fun. Then think about why wrestling is like getting tempted to do a bad thing, or like trying to find out the truth. Go on. I dare you.

Thanks to Deborah, Donna, Dominic, Rebecca, and Claire for all these ideas. Why is play important for young children's RE? What makes a playful classroom in RE work well? Do you have some more? Send them in to the editor, lat@retoday.org.uk Send your complaints about suggestion 10 to the editor as well.

Baptising Baby Querk

It's not always easy to make great RE happen with the under 5s, but it is true that every child on a school roll, including those in the reception year, is entitled to RE. Jo Crabtree of Brunshaw Primary School is always on the look out for creative play in RE, so we asked her about the recent christening her class arranged...

1. What did you do when you took the Querk to the church?

The children (2 Year 1 classes) went to the church at the end of a unit of work about Christian baptism. Prior to the visit the children had looked at how important water was to them and then to Christians. The children had also considered what it meant to belong to a group within a community. They had watched infant and adult baptisms online and collected photos from their friends who had been christened. Parents and God-parents had been selected by the classes as had names for the Querks (Ellabella and Isaac Jonny). Wrapping paper and christening banners had been printed (Numeracy), invitations had been designed, written and given out to the Senior Leadership Team (Literacy). Recipes had been followed and buns made for the party (DT) and batteries had been charged and put into digital cameras which the children were in charge of (ICT). The Querks had new outfits and were placed in pushchairs for the walk to church. Once there, the vicar (Father Roger Parker) reminded the children of what was going to happen and what the responsibilities of the god-parents were. The parents, god-parents and Querks gathered around the font and Ellabella and Isaac Jonny were christened.

2. How do the children relate to the Querk?

When the classes received their Querks they were un-named and were babies. The children have been encouraged to nurture and teach morals and values to them. The Querks go everywhere with the class, assemblies, all trips out, PE lessons, dinner etc. Every morning new children are chosen to be responsible for the Querks for the day, these children have to set a good example to Ellabella and Isaac or they will be given to another child to look after. The children get very emotional if they think one of the Querks is being treated too roughly and expect adults to intervene as if the Querks were members of the classes. The Querks are never

alone, they are usually under an arm or being held like a cherished baby. They are loved.

3. What were the reactions of the children to the church visit?

On the days leading up to the christening we were often asked by the parents "Who is Ellabella/Isaac?" as the children were referring to them as real people. Some of the children talked non stop about it all at home and 1 even lost sleep over it because she was so excited! The morning of the christenings was filled with over excited 5 year olds. One fun thing for us teachers was that when Fr Roger questioned the children about what was going to happen, a sea of hands went up in answer to every question showing how much they had learned through this approach. We were quite smug about it!!

4. What RE objectives were met in this session?

- To understand that when Christians are baptised they are following the example of Jesus.
- Explore the experience of being a member of a group or community.

Both of these objectives were lifted from the scheme of work we use in Lancashire.

5. What, from your point of view, made this good RE?

It was real and exciting

We linked many areas of the curriculum which ensured a deeper experience for the children
The work was blocked into 5 afternoons
Experiencing a church (the first time for many) made it 'real'.

Every child wanted to make the day special for Ellabella and Isaac because they are so important within the classes

A question table generated questions which could be investigated throughout the week
It engendered a sense of belonging to the Year 1 community and wider school community (the Headteacher attended the ceremony and the rest of the SLT came to the party)
Contributed greatly to spiritual development of the children

6. Anything else you'd like to add?

The children went to the christening party after the ceremony and had all chosen gifts to give to

Ellabella and Isaac. Initially we cut pictures of gifts from the Argos catalogue then developed the idea of gifts by asking the children to think of an invisible gift (your idea I believe) which they tried to represent in either a pictorial symbol or made of play dough. These were then wrapped and presented to the Querks with a reason for their choice of gifts. We still had a few boys wanting to give a Nintendo Wii but most grasped the idea.

Follow up work included producing a book using the laptops and photos the children took at the ceremony. The children selected photos and typed sentences as part of the recount unit in literacy the following week. This further extended the cross curricular aspect of it all.

Undesirable behaviour was completely absent, not a single child was reminded how to behave or show respect, they were all fully engaged in the celebrations.

Last week we were creating a timeline of things they children have done since joining Brunshaw Primary. The first thing they wanted putting on the timeline was Ellabella and Isaac Jonny's christenings. It was obviously a very memorable experience.

Enactments: when you use a querk or a doll, and enact a baptism or christening, what's missing? Would it be better education to visit a church when a baptism is taking place? But does an enactment help children to get a real feel of the event, in a more controlled educational context? Would it be good to have a role play corner for play, where the children can take Father Roger's role for themselves? If you have a view on this, then write to us. We'd like to hear more practice like this.