

The Living Difference Evaluation Project Report

How far does the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus 'Living Difference' facilitate effective teaching and successful learning in RE? An exploratory study

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Introduction

The Living Difference Evaluation Research Project was commissioned by the Religious Education team in the Hampshire County Council Education Department Inspection and Advisory Service (HIAS). It was undertaken by Katherine Wedell, an independent researcher who specialises in curriculum development in Religious Education.

In 2004 Hampshire, Portsmouth, and Southampton introduced a new Religious Education Agreed Syllabus called 'Living Difference'. Living Difference is significant because it provides a prescriptive and systematic pedagogical framework. It gives a process for teaching and learning and a conceptual analysis of religious material. This structures curriculum planning, assessment, and progression. There is a systematic and ongoing process of syllabus implementation.

The aim of this research project was to find out about the impact of Living Difference on teaching and learning in RE. Specifically, it looked at planning, measuring progression, assessing attainment, and the impact of Living Difference on attainment in Religious Education. It also looked at the training teachers received in using Living Difference.

The HIAS RE team had already undertaken a quantitative survey of how far teachers are implementing the Agreed Syllabus and how far teachers can see evidence of the syllabus raising attainment RE. This research was a qualitative follow-up. The survey asked a number of questions about teachers' implementation of Living Difference, including two key questions about improvements in students' attainment. The results are reproduced below. The aim of this research was to find out what it was about Living Difference that teachers felt had caused the improvements in students' attainment. The aim was also to see what might need developing or changing in the syllabus and its implementation.

Primary Schools Survey: 129 responses in total

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
There is evidence of enquire, contextualise, evaluate, communicate and apply resulting in improvements in progression in pupils' achievement in RE	11.9 %	44.0%	38.8%	3.0%	0.7%
There is evidence of improvement in attainment as pupils progress through a key stage, as a result of implementing Living Difference	5.2%	34.3%	50.0%	9.0%	0.7%

Secondary Survey: 28 responses in total

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
There is evidence of enquire, contextualise, evaluate, communicate and apply resulting in improvements in progression in pupils' achievement in RE	17.9 %	50.0%	28.6%	3.6%	0.0%
There is evidence of improvement in attainment as pupils progress through a key stage, as a result of implementing Living Difference	7.1%	42.9%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%

The Sample

A random sample of twenty teachers was chosen. These were all teachers who were using Living Difference and who had reported that they were finding the new syllabus effective in relation to their previous practice. The teachers in the sample were not chosen because they were seen as 'best practitioners' but simply because they were finding Living Difference effective compared to their previous practice. This was the only common feature among them.

The study sampled seven teachers of Key Stage 1, five teachers of Key Stage 2, one primary teacher, and seven secondary teachers. One teacher was interviewed per school. The majority of primary phase teachers were non-specialists but they were the RE managers. All the secondary phase interviewees were specialists and Heads of Department.

The sample size of twenty was used in order to be able to go into some depth, while at the same time indicating broader patterns of responses. A sample size of twenty can't show statistically significant variations, but can indicate emerging themes.

The Methodology

The aim was to ask the teachers what it was about Living Difference that in their opinions was more effective than their previous practice: what impact had Living Difference had on their practice and what effect was this having on students' attainment in RE? Was attainment higher? This research defines higher attainment in RE as: students exploring more deeply the significance of the beliefs, commitments, and values in the religions they study, using skills of analysis and explanation; students engaging more creatively and meaningfully with those beliefs, commitments, and values, giving responses based on clear arguments, in order to enrich and inform their own lives and ideas.

The research focused on teachers' use of the syllabus. As researcher I used the format of semi-structured interviews, sitting with teachers alongside their planning documentation and examples of students' work, asking them to talk through it to show how they used the syllabus. I asked five main questions:

1. Has Living Difference had an impact on your planning in RE? If so, in what ways?

2. Has Living Difference had an impact on how you measure progression in RE? If so, in what ways?
3. Has Living Difference had an impact on how you assess attainment in RE? If so, in what ways?
4. What is it about Living Difference that you think has raised students' attainment in RE?
5. What training have you received in using the syllabus? Has this had an impact on your use of Living Difference? If so, in what ways?

The research asked the questions in this order because it was looking primarily at the practice of teachers. It looked at how the syllabus was impacting on their practice and what effect teachers thought this was having on students' attainment and why. While students' attainment is clearly the purpose of teaching, and reports on attainment start with attainment, this research started with teachers' use of the syllabus in their practice because this was the primary focus.

The aim was to ask open questions and to record what the teachers said. The points that came up were the points that teachers mentioned in response to the five questions. The findings set out the points made and the number of teachers, in each Key Stage who made those points.

The interviews were recorded on audio tape and then reviewed. I divided teachers' comments into those dealing with planning, progression, assessment, attainment, and training. There were general themes that came up frequently in teachers' comments. I further grouped the comments according to these themes. This was in order to see more clearly the kinds of things that teachers were talking about and to be able to compare what teachers were saying about these things. The aim at this point was not to interpret teachers' comments but to lay out the findings clearly.

The themes I picked out from the interviews have been analysed by an independent moderator, to check that they reflect as accurately as possible what the interviewees were saying.

The following section sets out the research findings. 'Living Difference' has been abbreviated to LD.

The Findings

Planning

1.The impact of LD on planning

All but two of the teachers commented that LD was a big change to the way they plan RE. What was new was starting with the concept and using the learning cycle. Four teachers said it took time for them to get their heads around LD. Of those, two said that implementing LD was a big planning task. Two more also made the same point, one commenting that planning using LD is more demanding and takes longer because planning is more in-depth. Two teachers commented that it is easier to plan with LD, because there is a clear focus on the concept and because there is less subject content.

Most teachers are using units of work from the handbooks, units developed in the Development Groups, and also writing units themselves. Two wrote all or almost all the new units themselves. One teacher did not write any units from scratch. Eight of the teachers said that they found units to fit in with the content and resources that they already had. Six said that they rejigged units from the handbooks and development groups to fit in with their teaching and resources. Three said that LD was a complete change to all their planning.

When the cycle first came in I thought 'Oh my goodness'. But it's made a huge difference and the children love it.

I panicked when I saw the circle. What does Contextualise and Evaluate mean?

Living Difference is when time started. The strength of LD is that it tells you how to get there.

2. Comments on Enquire and Contextualise

One Key Stage 2 and three secondary teachers commented that Enquire needs to be a hook to engage the students in their learning. The choice of activities and resources in Enquire is very important for the success of the cycle. One of these teachers said that while the choice of activities is important, the process of Enquiry lends itself to students working together and talking about what they are doing.

One secondary teacher commented that the Enquire element tells students the purpose of their learning. By enquiring into the concept first, the students know what they are looking for in the contextual material.

One Key Stage 1 teacher, two Key Stage 2, and five secondary teachers said that the Contextualise element of the cycle has to be deep and stimulating enough to be a basis for Evaluate. Contextualise is the evidence base that the students use to evaluate the importance of the concept.

It became clear working with LD how important the context is. If you've got a really good context, evaluation becomes much simpler. Something to really pin [evaluation] on in terms of the value of the concept for believers. If you've got a good context that really goes to the depths of this, then students will understand that this isn't stupid, that this has real meaning for these people. Even if the concept doesn't mean much to you, it doesn't mean you can't appreciate the value of the concept to other people. That's what good enquiry, based on good context, allows children to see.

Four teachers across the key stages pointed to Contextualise as a key element for progression:

It's what you use to contextualise the concept that develops their response. For example, Forgiveness. Y7 context of Jesus's death and resurrection. In Y9 Abortion and Sanctity of Life: will God forgive somebody who has had an abortion? Forgiveness

is not black and white and there are different Christian viewpoints. The much more complex issue gives the different response, because as they grow older, you are giving them more complex situations to deal with.

Seven teachers across the key stages pointed to higher order thinking skills in Contextualise. The students are applying the concept in the particular context, not just taking in information. This application of the concept in this context makes the context more meaningful and also easier to understand. Two teachers commented that in Contextualise the students learn enquiry skills – what one teacher called the ‘*where what why who how questions*’.

[In the Year 3 unit on angels]...We go on to Contextualise and we're then looking at Christmas cards that have got angels on and so obviously looking at angels from the Christian point of view. And they put them into categories and again that's quite interesting because I've got loads...and they'll categorise them into angels that are playing trumpets or musical instruments, or angels that are wearing party frocks, or angels that are in a white dress, or angels that are praying....it's their ideas, I don't do any input in that at all, it's their decision. And then we go on and we look at the gospel versions of the Christmas story and where angels are mentioned...and they have to highlight all the angel bits...and then they compare the different angel bits in the different gospels, which again, they can do it, they don't have to have a lot of input from me...then we go on to evaluate the purpose of the angels in the story...

Two Key Stage 1 teachers said that Contextualise is the hard and fast teaching element, that it is straightforward. Another Key Stage 2 teacher commented that ‘*there is a lot of teacher input in Contextualise because it's quite alien, but it's done through exploration and experience.*

One secondary teacher commented that the context in which you place the concept is what you use to evaluate the concept. The context is the students' evidence base for making evaluative statements. Therefore LD makes very clear what it is that you are evaluating.

3. Comments on Evaluate

Three primary phase and two secondary teachers said that in the Evaluate element, the students are challenged to think their own thoughts independently. Three of those commented that this was a change from previous teaching. One teacher commented that this could be difficult for less confident teachers.

One of the most powerful bits is Evaluate – asking ‘what difference does it make?’ gets kids hypothesising and questioning. What other subject does that?

Evaluation gets the kids to think in a way they haven't thought before. It challenges students. Creates independent thinkers. And RE wasn't always challenging. Now we're saying to the kids ‘What do you think?’

If teachers are confident enough they can say 'Hey, do we like this? What do we think?' But less confident staff feel it's a sensitive subject so they are less likely to evaluate. Subject knowledge is quite a big issue.

One Key Stage 1 and one secondary teacher said that in your planning you have to raise the evaluative questions beforehand, in your choice of concept, in your choice of question, material, and activities in Enquire and Contextualise. One commented that this is demanding of the teacher.

Three teachers across the key stages commented that Evaluate from without (students giving their own opinions on the significance of the concept) was challenging. Where students have limited experience and/or non-religious backgrounds they find it difficult to evaluate religious concepts.

One Key Stage 2 teacher said that the students found it difficult in one unit to evaluate the significance of the concept within the religious context.

Two Key Stage 1 and one secondary teacher commented that the Evaluate element was difficult to plan.

Evaluate is harder to assess than other steps. You have to know what kinds of questions to ask. Clive came to see a lesson and gave some examples of questions you could ask. Evaluate is the part that people don't do...just a feeling.

4. Comments on Communicate and Apply

Six teachers across the key stages commented that Communicate and Apply connects the religious material to the students' experience.

...if you plan well from Apply, then the rest of the lesson flows – the kids then ask the questions – because it engages the students right from the start in something that involves them.

Having Communicate after Contextualise is important. The kids can see that that's an important value to that community, so it's okay for them for example to say what they're devoted to. They are less embarrassed.

Two Key Stage 2 and one secondary teacher said that Communicate and Apply challenge and liberate the students.

The children challenge each other, have to think more, learn to accept that there are different viewpoints.

In Communicate and Apply the students can play with ideas themselves. They are liberated from 'right answers'. They are not frightened of expressing themselves. This

allows us to get into meaningful discussion. Kids gain a confidence which allows them to open themselves up to learning.

One Key Stage 1 and one secondary teacher commented that the high achievers are more able to access the Apply element. A Key Stage 2 teacher commented that more passive children can get left behind with any evaluative teaching approach.

The second Apply is extension work, because it pulls the whole cycle together. For the most able: 'What if we were to put the concept in this scenario – would it still mean the same to you?' I never bother to assess Communicate and Apply at the start. All can access this.

Four teachers across the key stages reported some difficulty with Apply. Two Key Stage 1 teachers were finding that Communicate and Apply were muddled. One said it was hard to get the right questions to enable the students to apply the concept in their own lives and the lives of others. Two said that it was hard to get the students to apply religious concepts in their own lives.

Application can be hard. We had to unpack what 'prayer' is (for example, about asking for help). There can be a tenuous connection between the pupil and the religious material.

5.Using a skills- and concept-led curriculum

All the teachers liked the fact that the curriculum is skills and concept-led. They commented that it is good because the focus is on ideas and their significance. The content serves this. Two teachers commented that the concept is far wider than 'we must do xyz'. You are free to pick the most appropriate content. You can spend time on the concept. This helps less able students flourish. You can spend time on the students' own voices. You and the students are not overloaded with content. Non-specialist teachers don't have to have so much subject knowledge. The emphasis is on independent learning and cognitive skills. Living Difference clarifies the learning process and the concept provides a clear aim. This makes planning easier.

Lessons are more punchy and pacy, and clear and focussed, because we're not bogged down with so much content. Discussion lessons have hugely improved since Living Difference, because we're now free to spend time on a concept. Not rushing through content. Kids latch onto the ideas better than they did in the past because there isn't the content there. For example, they can focus on Hindu ideas about reincarnation, not what happens at a Hindu burial. It's clearer. Focused on what really matters...Living Difference inspires high level discussion because we're dealing with ideas – the nitty gritty of RE, the concepts rather than the content.

Two teachers commented that it could be hard to give up content.

Year 1 were doing Badger's Parting Gifts and didn't want to give it up.

It felt unsafe at first because we were getting rid of content stuff that had been our bread and butter for years. Now just looking at one or two concepts was quite scary.

One commented that there was a danger that the religious content could be an afterthought after discussing the concept.

One teacher said she thought there was too little content – that LD is too specific – but that specificity gives us structure.

Two secondary teachers said that they did not always use the Living Difference cycle at GCSE because there was too much content to get through.

6. LD in the context of the whole curriculum

In all the schools RE was taught as a discrete subject, in order to maintain the integrity of the learning cycle and the centrality of the concept. One of the secondary schools had an integrated Humanities curriculum, in which RE, Geography, and History were taught in consecutive blocks with a shared topic. Here, the teacher commented that Living Difference made possible RE input into History and Geography topics.

One area of study was Antarctica. The concept-led curriculum made RE input possible. The concepts of purpose, sacrifice, life after death, and stewardship in the context of Antarctica and Scott's mission and the story of Captain Oates. We could then enquire into these concepts in religious contexts. Here were four meaty cycles.

Eleven teachers across the key stages commented that Living Difference uses learning and thinking skills which are transferable across the curriculum, in particular speaking and listening, evaluation, justifying opinions, and literacy. The learning cycle is similar to other subjects with an 'enquiry' approach, for example Design and Technology.

I don't see LD as an isolated thing – I see that 'what if?' is a creative way of thinking.

LD facilitates cross-curricular work because the skills are transferable.

P4C is used here...discussion and justifying opinions is high profile. LD lays out thinking skills.

Six primary phase and one secondary teacher commented that Living Difference has strong links with PHSE and emotional literacy work and enhances those aspects of the curriculum.

I plan the Rights and Respect aspect of the curriculum as well. Rights and Respect, Every Child Matters, PSE, circle time – LD has made all this more coherent. RE creeps out into everything because the concept in RE enables the pupils to make connections, it takes the learning out further than RE.

Five primary phase teachers said that Living Difference provides opportunities for a wider range of activities and learning styles than they had previously used.

Elements in Living Difference provide opportunities for different types of activities that perhaps previously we wouldn't have considered under the RE banner.

7. Other staff responses to using LD

All the interviewees said that their colleagues like and in some cases love Living Difference. Nine teachers across the key stages reported that there was initial resistance from other staff. Two said that there was enthusiasm from the start because Living Difference provided a coherent set of work.

At the start, Living Difference met with some resistance from others in the department, when the depth of change was clear – especially from established staff – ‘been there, done it’. They eventually came round to my way of thinking and are singing LD’s praises, especially the evaluation section. Things have come on.

At first, my colleague looked at Living Difference and said there is too much chat and not enough written work. Now my colleague loves it – it’s phenomenal what we’ve done with the children compared to what was going on before.

All of the primary phase interviewees provided their colleagues with long- and medium-term plans for RE, using the Living Difference format. Some of these plans came from the Handbook, some from plans developed in the Development Groups, and some the teachers had written themselves. Twelve of the thirteen primary phase interviewees commented that their colleagues like Living Difference because the plans are clear and focused and provide good guidance. Non-specialists can see where they are going in their RE teaching and they know what they are doing at each step. Three commented that RE is now always taught, which was not the case before LD was introduced. Five primary phase and one secondary teacher said that their colleagues liked the fact that they did not have to have so much subject knowledge.

RE is never not taught. It’s a high priority because of the clear format. The staff come and ask me for the RE planning.

Two primary phase and one secondary teacher commented on the learning cycle. One said that it helped non-specialist staff feel more confident. The other said that it was difficult for less confident colleagues. The secondary teacher said that a Maths specialist colleague, teaching Key Stage 3 RE, could easily grasp the skills base of the Living Difference cycle – that this provided clear learning objectives.

The five elements make teachers feel more confident...Now it’s not teachers explaining things and having answers, but ‘what do you [ie the pupils] think?’

There is still an issue of people being worried about kids asking difficult questions about religion and they don't know how to answer. For some people it's about being up there giving answers. This has always been a stumbling block for RE.

Three primary phase teachers commented on the concept based approach. One said it was a big change for other staff. One said that some staff find the concept restrictive. One said that other staff like the concept approach because they don't need so much subject knowledge.

Living Difference focuses on the concept. It was a big thing to get this across to staff. It was a different way of teaching.

8.Planning using the concepts

Two primary phase teachers and one secondary teacher reported problems relating Type B and C concepts to students' experience.

'Umma' is the least popular unit. There are lots of complaints. It's not of the children's experience. There is scepticism amongst teachers. Some of them. A few of them. They say it's hard. The Umma label – some feel it doesn't relate to kids here. In the Umma unit we start with Enquire. We brainstorm 'community'. In Contextualise we do three Pillars in three lesson. We look at prayer mats, Eid, Hajj. There is lots of Contextualise. We think about why it's important for Muslims to participate in these activities – why/why not. What if a Muslim didn't feel part of Umma? Might there be situations where you don't want to? What communities do the children belong to? Is it important to feel part of a community? There is not a great deal of response from the children. It's not a big thing for the kids. Not much to say about it. They have little experience of community. 'Belonging' in Y3 does work.

Four of the secondary teachers commented on the centrality of the concept in their planning.

The concept is at the centre. Then you've got how you want to break the concept down. Nothing more.

Four secondary teachers and one Key Stage 2 teacher commented on the freedom to choose concepts and the importance of choosing concepts which are challenging and relevant to the students.

You can vary the concepts if you and the kids are bored with the concept or if it doesn't engage the kids so much. Teaching and learning become fresher.

One unit [from the handbook] went on too long, was too in-depth, and the students got lost in it...so we changed one of the concepts. We took out Injustice and put in Praxis, belief into action. But we are still using the process.

One secondary teacher commented on the process of formulating key questions about the concept.

LD helps you formulate key questions. You focus on the concept, and on the process that makes the kids see a problem, a controversy, two or more sides. The key question needs to reflect a dichotomy. I ask 'does the key question do justice to the concept?' The plenary is kids answering the key question. Living Difference made me realise that I don't have to make the question controversial for controversial's sake – maybe I used to because I had less faith in the lesson. I go for a question and make it a bit more straightforward. If the question helps the kids understand the concept in its fullest implications then it's done its job. If the question is too hard you find the cycle hasn't answered it.

This teacher also commented on the issue of analysing a concept before planning a unit of work

When planning, you've got to concept-crack at the start of the cycle. Unravel what the concept fully means. Then you appreciate how the secular world understands or doesn't understand the concept. It's not all just about what this means in the religious tradition. CE, JL and I go very deep into the meaning of a concept. For example Trinity as a conception of God: Incarnate God, God the Father. 'Do you think that only Christians could truly understand God?' would be a question that would get to the depths of the Trinity idea and how you take into consideration other views. You have to spend time thinking about all the different manifestations and implications of a subject. Eg Umma as the global world of Muslims regardless of colour etc. The next stage is to think 'What are the implications of that idea?' You've got to do this level of unpacking before you can set the key question and the first Communicate and Apply activity.

9.The support of the Head, time, resources, and personnel

At Key Stage 1 and 2 teachers are using existing resources, making some, and using internet sources such as REOnline. One secondary teacher commented that a lot of the resources for Living Difference are not with it, so you have to make up your own, which means you have to adapt the plans from the handbook.

One Key Stage 2 teacher and two secondary teachers mentioned textbooks:

There is little scope for using textbooks. Great!

Teachers need to be proactive. Textbooks don't have enough depth for Contextualise. It helps to look at the newspapers every day. And books.

There is a need for materials to teach Living Difference because textbooks don't use the LD format. Textbooks are content-based.

Five teachers mentioned the Head teacher, who was supportive of RE in each case.

PPA time was mentioned by two Key Stage 2 teachers

I teach only Music and RE, in one half-day block per fortnight per class, in other teachers' PPA time. This gives good continuity. I have complete control and have RE covered. [Otherwise] 'If anything's going to go by the board it would have been the RE'.

RE is done in blocked units of work. PPA causes problems. Because RE is 'contained' staff often hand it over to PPA cover.

Seven teachers mentioned time as a factor in planning. Three reported that they were given time to plan; one said that no extra time was provided by the school for implementing Living Difference. Four reported insufficient timetable time to deliver RE.

Only two teachers specifically mentioned their budget. One had a 'good' budget; the other had no budget but was utilising lots of existing resources, making some, and using internet sources.

In all the primary phase schools the RE manager is providing the planning for the rest of the staff. One commented that '*the strength of Living Difference relies on the RE manager being absolutely clear about the vision and how you get there*'.

Progression

10. Using the concept hierarchy to plan progression

All the teachers interviewed are using the ABC concept progression.

I moved some units up or down [when implementing LD], so that A concepts were in YR and Y1 and Bs in Y2. Concepts get more abstract in each successive year. For example, Darkness to Light with the Pascal candle builds on Changing Emotions in Y1 and Celebrating New Life in YR. I used LD to guide this.

One Key Stage 1 teacher commented that the concept progression in Living Difference helped to make explicit what teachers were doing unconsciously.

Living Difference did have an effect on progression, but not consciously. The hierarchy helped to think things through and process things.

One Key Stage 1 teacher commented that the ABC concept progression relates the level of learning to the developmental stages of the children.

Two Key Stage 2 teachers and one secondary teacher commented that the progression is not only from less to more complex concepts. The progression is also in the context in which you

present those concepts. Some contexts present more challenging questions about the concept and demand more skills from the students.

The more complex concepts and content is in Y6.

Contextualisation drives the progression. How simple or difficult the concept is depends on the context. The complication is not the concept but how it impacts on people. This is how you get the progression. For example, in Y7 we look at Salvation, Forgiveness, and Agape in the context of the teaching of Jesus. In Communicate and Apply, the students give examples of people forgiving. In Y8 in the Equality and Justice unit we look at Jihad and Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King and issues of violence and non-violence. In Y9 we look at Ahimsa in Hinduism and Free Will. Satyagraha and non-violence need the maturity of Y9. We look at Gandhi in Y9 because it can be looked at too simply in Y8...

There is a complex relationship between expectations, the concept, and the learning cycle.

The progression is not just in 'simple' or 'complex' concepts but in pupils' response. You've got to make the development in pupil responses. It's not enough to say 'simple or complex concept'. You've got to show the students how to develop that response. Otherwise you just get Y7 responses to complex concepts, because their skill level hasn't progressed.

11.Using the level descriptors to set learning objectives and measure progression

Six primary phase teachers commented that the level descriptors are helpful because they contain specific key words. Six secondary teachers also referred to the fact that the level descriptors identify specific skills. One secondary teacher said that it was initially hard to find the key words in the secondary level descriptors.

The level descriptors are brilliant because of the key words – identify, describe, explain etc. These words are the learning objectives. With every other subject you have a whacking great paragraph and have to go for 'best fit'.

The kids know that 'describe' is level 3 and 'explaining' is level 4 and that the way to get into level 5 is to make links between concepts from a sequence of lessons and identify issues raised.

All but three teachers said that they were using the level descriptors to set learning objectives and measure progression. The key words in the level descriptors are their learning objectives. The key words in the level descriptors tell them what the students do with the concept. The level descriptors identify the skill a student is using and the skill they need to develop next to progress. Therefore teachers and students can see progression.

The learning objectives are tied in to how the cycle works and the levels. It took a while for teachers to twig this. 'Students will understand...' is not a testable learning objective. Being able to explain is a testable learning objective. That is your objective and that links in exactly with the levels.

The level descriptors are based on skills. The level descriptors are clear. Therefore the students understand where they have come from in their work and where they are going.

It's good for me, the assessment side of it, because I know what I'm looking for. They know what I'm looking for, on the whole. A level now means something to them. They know the skills required to move up a level. They know, when they're being taught in a lesson, that they're progressing, because the skills are getting progressively harder.

Of the primary phase teachers not yet using the level descriptors, one commented that measuring progression is very difficult in RE. Another commented that it is hard to use the level descriptors because you have to be clear about the learning objectives.

12. Using the learning cycle to set learning objectives

Four primary phase and six secondary phase teachers said that they have a specific learning objective for each element of the learning cycle. Four of these teachers said that this made it easier to measure progression.

LD makes it easier to share the learning objectives because there is one clear concept and five learning objectives – one in each element of the cycle. There is a clear focus of how you are moving round that cycle and moving on to the next thing.

Level descriptors are always 'best fit'. But because they fit in with the cycle you can logically see the progression from one level to another. For example, level 3 'describe' moving up to 'explanation'. And then breaking down for each point 'this is what I need to do to be able to enquire – describe or explain this concept - and then in the context': It's all so much clearer.

Four teachers commented that the concept gives the focus to the five learning objectives of the cycle.

You're very focused on what the concept is and that helps you to focus on lesson objectives. Then assessing learning as you go along - that's made all of that a lot tighter, to focus in on.

One Key Stage 1 teacher commented that the learning cycle, plus the concept, gives an RE purpose to activities.

I had to rethink activities. For example in Harvest. Before LD the pupils wrote thank-you letters (a literacy activity). Now there is an RE focus to that activity. You use literacy but

focus on the concept. This activity is now used for 'apply': the difference it makes to get or send a thank-you letter. The RE concept gives purpose to the activity.

One secondary teacher commented on using the cycle to set learning objectives in discussion-based lessons.

With LD there is a danger of too much discussion. You need to follow up the cycle. You need clear learning outcomes, in order to know how to move the lesson on. You need to be very clear about where you want to end up and use the cycle to enable the discussion to move round, to keep the cycle of learning moving.

13. Progression between key stages

Two primary phase teachers commented that they were able to meet and discuss with teachers from other key stage at development group meetings.

One secondary teacher said that some pupils had clearly worked in the Living Difference way at Key Stage 2; three others said that pupils coming up did not seem to have a clear grasp of the cycle. Three did not comment. One teacher said that Living Difference had raised the expected standards of attainment at Key Stage 3.

LD has raised the bar at Key Stage 3. At KS3 we would do for example 'Symbolism', not 'Symbol'. We can start with more complex concepts.

Two secondary teachers said that using Living Difference, the rate of improvement in students' attainment from the start to the end of Year 7 to the end, was in one case faster than before using Living Difference and in the other case faster than the rate of progression in English.

Two secondary teachers commented that the level of students' work which they see at Key Stage 3 and 4, using Living Difference, is higher than GCSE expectations.

I see level 8 work. A at GCSE is less advanced than level 8. GCSE does not require the students to have that level of thought.*

One secondary teacher commented that the experience of using LD at Key Stage 3 is giving students greater confidence at GCSE.

Assessment

14. Assessment using the learning cycle

Two Key Stage 1 teachers commented that splitting assessment into the five elements of the learning cycle gives a much more nuanced picture of a student's attainment.

Six Key Stage 1 teachers, three Key Stage 2 and three secondary teachers made the point that with Living Difference you can assess each element of the learning cycle separately. Assessment is more specific and learning objectives are clearer.

One element is assessed for each unit over the year. It's easier because you've not got this big thing you're assessing. You assess just one thing. It's more explicit.

Living Difference makes it easier to get evidence of attainment because the structure separates the different learning objectives.

Two secondary teachers also made the point that when you assess in the same way that you have taught, teachers are clearer about what they are assessing and the students also understand what they are being assessed on.

The level descriptors are dovetailed into the methodology: this is the biggest impact on students. LD is so assessable. Students can see that they've been taught, and learned, in the same way that they're going to be assessed. They can remember the lesson in which they did that element. You're assessing one or more parts of the cycle.

There has never before been a tallying up of teaching and assessing. There have been levels and awareness of skills in those levels. But if you're taught in a completely different way, I don't see how remotely scientific any assessment can be, because you've probably used different language with the kids when you were teaching them. So you might have evaluated something, but if you didn't make that explicit, which LD makes you do, I think it's always been very difficult for students, and to set an assessment, but it's not any more. The importance of language again. Eg 'when we did Evaluate' or 'when we did Contextualisation' – this is now what you're going to be assessed on. On the assessment itself you can give them reminders.

Seven teachers across the key stages commented that Living Difference assesses students' skills, not just their recall.

Before LD, assessment was based on fact-recall and vocabulary recall. Now in their assessment the students show understanding of why someone does something. LD has upped the ante on the level of learning – especially on Evaluation. On Contextualise it has also improved. It's not just facts, but it's what people believe and key facts that reflect those beliefs, i.e. they're picking out key facts. We're getting the kids to understand why somebody does something. As a result, assessment has gone up. Much more academic, much more rigorous. The kids are grappling with key issues. For some of the kids, their assessments have improved beyond recognition.

Two primary phase teachers had not fully embedded the level descriptors in their assessment, but still felt clear about the expected learning outcomes for each element of the cycle. In one

case this was because the expected learning outcomes for each element were set out clearly on the planning. *'Because the planning is clear, the outcome is clear'*.

Four primary phase teachers are not yet assessing each element in the cycle. Two are currently assessing Contextualise and one of those also assesses Communicate. Two are starting to develop assessment using Living Difference.

15. Living Difference and GCSE

Of the seven secondary teachers interviewed, six said that using Living Difference at GCSE appeared to have a positive impact on students' attainment in the exam. Three explained that using Living Difference had improved students' ability to explain ideas, make evaluative statements, and justify their opinions in their exam work. One of these teachers and a further teacher commented that they base their GCSE courses on concepts, which helps students to grasp those concepts which they can use in the exam and also helps to *'hinge it all together'*.

Improved learning skills appear to have impacted on GCSE: A - C grades using the Welsh Board short course have improved from 54% in 2004 to 62% in 2005 and to 73.9% in 2007. There is only one set of results pre 2004.*

People are concerned that their results will be okay at Key Stage 4 now we're introducing Living Difference, because the exam boards haven't cottoned on to this. The cycle fits the Welsh board. Writing exam schemes of work with LD isn't difficult. Once we've bitten the bullet it'll be okay. Discussion isn't black and white any more. Now it's 'I think this because...' and 'I understand that others think that because...' Really useful for GCSE. So the longer Living Difference is around, the better the impact on Key Stage 4.

Three teachers are using the Welsh Board and commented that this board's approach dovetails with Living Difference's approach. Two teachers said that using LD at GCSE is a balancing act; you have to be careful to organise the material in a way that helps the students to understand the GCSE syllabus requirements. One said that there was not enough time to teach all the content in a conceptual enquiry way. Two teachers commented that the exam is content-driven and does not give the marks for evaluation of which students using Living Difference are capable.

Last year we got 91% A-C at GCSE with Year 11. With Living Difference, it's so in-depth it's at a higher level than GCSE. With Living Difference you get deep discussion. There are marks for content at GCSE.*

16. Using the level descriptors to assess and moderate work

Six teachers across the two phases commented that moderating work is difficult.

I need more clarity about what constitutes each level in the level descriptors.

What do the levels look like?

Four primary phase teachers, however, said that Living Difference makes moderation easier than it would otherwise be.

Moderating is made easier by the focus of work. There is the concept and you're looking at how far the pupil is describing or explaining the concept.

Moderation is difficult because it is subjective – but generally moderation is subjective. Assessment is always subjective. LD lessens the subjectivity, because you've got the three words [i.e. identify, describe, explain].

Assessment is probably the most problematic. It's very subjective and impossible to put a template on children's work. Each one is a permutation. But because you've got those key words [in the level descriptors] you're asking yourself the question 'are they identifying, describing, or explaining?' It's as easy as you can get it in the real world.

17.Purposes and methods of assessment

Five teachers at primary level are using assessment to fine-tune teaching.

Because LD is so explicit about what you're after, if you're not getting the point across, then you're not getting the higher quality work from the kids, so lower quality work evaluates the teaching. You look at [for example], is this the best activity, how useful is the vehicle for assessment (eg discussion or sorting cards). Or, is this the best place to assess for example Evaluate?

Six primary phase teachers said that they are using a greater variety of ways to record assessment. Five commented that they are listening and talking to students more and assessing what they are saying in discussion. One commented that there is twice as much written work and display work now than there was before Living Difference was introduced, because RE is taught more – before Living Difference RE tended to get left out.

Assessing enquiry and application skills: I think the problem some people have here is in the nature of how they like to assess. They like to have a bit of paper in front of them. But in some elements of LD there is less writing. I still assess, through noting down on post-it notes what children say in discussion. You can assess in other elements if you're prepared to do that.

It depends on the activity how easy it is to assess. If children write you've got more to look at. You can still note on post-its. There is a danger of just sampling written stuff. With LD you're not thinking 'What am I going to churn out at the end?' You think 'Actually I'm going to listen to these children and question their understanding, rather than just collect in thirty sheets of paper'.

One secondary teacher commented on the freedom in Living Difference to change and tweak assessment activities.

I had to develop some of the assessment activities because the students needed something more concrete. For example, in Creation and Christian Aid the assessment was too complex. I simplified the language and separated out the five elements and planned individual rather than group activities. LD allows you to do this. It's not prescriptive. I changed the assessment task. We're still in the cycle on Evaluate, but we're doing it in a different way.

What is it about Living Difference that you think raises students' attainment?

18.The concept gives meaning to the religious material

Four primary phase teachers made the point that students select what is meaningful in the religious material in relation to the concept. The concept means that students are focusing on the meaning of the material, not just on content. The students are finding the material meaningful, they are not just collecting facts.

Living Difference helps pupils to focus on what they are looking for in the material – on what makes it meaningful...'

It was her answer, I was so gobsmacked, she's not five yet, she's not five till August and it was when we were doing Change, which was in the Spring term. We were doing Zacchaeus...and how did meeting Jesus change him. And she said 'Well he had a cold heart before he met Jesus and then because Jesus loved him he had a warm one'...she was so there on board with you....and she doesn't go to church...and she went on to say 'Because if nobody loves you, you have a cold heart'

Two Key Stage 1 teachers said that the concept links students' experience with the religion. This enables students to understand religious material that is beyond their own experience.

The concept provides children with a way in to something beyond their own experience. Before, the children confused the content – eg Jesus and Moses. Concepts give a better way in and access to the material. Gives them a way in to something that's a little bit more tricky, that demands a little bit more understanding. Gives them a handle on it, You're not teaching it in isolation.

Two Key Stage 2 teachers commented that the concept stimulates students' questions about the religious material.

Before, the pupils were taught 'at'. For example, the Easter story was retold, knowledge was imparted. At the end of one Spring term a colleague said that she had to 'Get resurrection done by the end of school on Friday'. Now LD encourages depth of thought. For example, we look at Passion week through concept of welcoming. Now the pupils are reflecting for example on 'how can people change their minds so quickly?' It stimulates those questions.

Two teachers commented that using Living Difference, the students focus on one concept, not on lots of 'bits' of information. Therefore they remember it.

Just give them something they can understand, and they can pin on, and then they can take that away with them; that'll make a real difference to the way they view other faiths, other people, and build on it. Instead of 'I can't remember a thing she was talking about because there were so many things' they take away the concept and its application to that faith. The tiny bit they can take away with them, that really means something.

19. Links between the religious material and students' lives

Seventeen of the teachers explicitly commented that the students are motivated to learn in RE because they can relate the concept to their own lives.

The concept really means something to the pupils. So they are interested and keen and find the work exciting and relevant and so the quality of work goes up.

LD helps teachers to deliver interesting RE – it's got variety and point and it's linked to kids' lives, not as a religious topic. It's not six weeks on parables and you read one every week. All of it is about how those particular concepts affect children's lives and that's what I think is good about it.

Two Key Stage 1 teachers commented that the students can apply the concept to make connections beyond RE and so extend their learning.

Because RE is concept based, the pupils can make connections beyond RE. This is the other key thing. For example, they can find many examples of 'change' and think about how and why things change.

One teacher commented that the students are focusing on the same concept in their own lives and in the religious material and so they identify with people from the faith communities.

One teacher commented that it can be a danger that religious content is an afterthought after discussing the concept.

Two teachers said that where students don't see a connection between the concept and their own lives, units don't work well.

We're hindered by the fact that these concepts are beyond their personal experience. We use numerous examples, eg football teams, to try to relate it, but it's still a struggle. With middle and high achievers it's easier.

20.LD and thinking and learning skills

All the interviewees said that Living Difference teaches and assesses learning skills and that this raises students' attainment. Two main points emerge here. Firstly, the learning cycle and the levels of skill in the level descriptors set out what students actually do with the concept and the religious material. Each part of the cycle is a higher order thinking skill. Students are learning to enquire, contextualise, evaluate, communicate and apply concepts. Secondly, what the students learn they can apply more broadly, both in terms of skills and concepts.

LD is build upon a grounded philosophy of how children learn. It takes it away from 'I'm going to tell you something' – then they know what you know and no more.

LD equips the students with the skills to take a concept, to open it up, develop it, and apply it to different situations. It's not just recitation. Instead of 'a festival' and telling the students, LD gives the students much more understanding of why people were involved. Then the students have the confidence to tackle anything that comes up, rather than thinking 'I haven't been spoonfed and I don't know where to go with that question'.

Enquire, Contextualise, Evaluate, Communicate, Apply: all higher order thinking skills. The skills in LD are frankly functional skills in today's world. I want them to be able to think for themselves, to state and justify what they think.

The skills in LD are focussed. What you apply to them is open.

Two secondary teachers commented that learning something as a concept is harder than learning facts.

Learning something as a concept is harder than learning facts. To explain and evaluate is more demanding than to regurgitate facts. For example, Resurrection, its importance in Christianity and its impact on students' lives: a very high level task. Concepts are abstract. This is positive because it means we are challenging and stretching the students further. In the first year of LD, KS3 results went down because the expectations for levels were higher than before.

Two secondary teachers commented that Living Difference gives students a framework for independent learning.

The child is at the centre of the LD process – this is basic in the LD approach. I'm a great believer in pupil ownership and independence of learning. I planned lessons together with Y9 and Y11. I gave them the concepts I needed them to understand. They planned it and taught it, using the LD process. LD enables you to be able to do that.

21.Building on previous learning

Eight teachers said that students' attainment has risen because the students build on previous learning. Two points emerged here. Firstly, the students retain previous learning because they

make links with concepts from previous units. Secondly, the students are able to build on their skills. They know where they are coming from and where they are going because the process of learning is clear and the level descriptors are clear.

With LD, the pupils build their learning on transferable concepts. They bring their conceptual understanding from earlier units to bear on current learning. For example, they bring their understanding of the concept of the authority in the context of sacred books to understanding the concept of authority in the context of Jesus. Learning is then as it were building a wall, not just collecting bricks.

I like to be explicit re Enquire, Contextualise, Evaluate, Communicate, Apply. Then the kids know exactly where they've been and where they're going. What raises attainment is their understanding of where they're going and where they've come from and the clarity of the level descriptors.

22. Breadth and scope of opportunities to achieve

Seven teachers across the phases said that Living Difference gives more students more breadth of opportunity to achieve. This is because the concepts are stimulating. It is also because the learning process is separated out into five elements. Students with low skills in one area can have high skills in another. The separated out learning process has 'opened up teachers and pupils to more ways of working'.

Contextualise is only one fifth of the circle...you're always coming back to the children and what they think about the concept. It's easier than it would have been before, because kids can achieve even if they're not high achievers in Contextualise.

Using LD there is more variety of task and this flags up things pupils are good at. The five elements flag up what kids are good at. A lot of assessment is what kids say. LD furthers personalised learning. This was not the case before LD.

LD has separated out the learning process. This has opened up teachers and pupils to more ways of working. The pupils do more challenging work – eg taking photos, using computers, making clay angels. This greater variety of ways of working has resulted in higher attainment from pupils with lower ability. More stuff is part of RE. It suits more children's learning styles than before. It enables kids to demonstrate achievement, capturing more kids' attainment.

It is the concept which enables more varied, more creative expression. LD gives scope for any creative activity.

LD has enabled children who wouldn't have achieved to achieve now. Because it isn't all 'write in your books'. So much discussion, cross-curricular, drama, art, speaking and listening. Some of those children who never write anything down have astounded me...LD embraces all children, all children's skills, and gives every child a voice.

Four teachers mentioned the importance of the particular task set. Three teachers made the point that it is important not to cap the task, to ensure that the task gives full scope for the skill the students are using. One said that you have to find ways of engaging all students.

Two teachers commented that listening to students and questioning them in discussion allows a deeper assessment of what they are thinking and how they are learning.

One Key Stage 2 teacher said that lower ability students flourish because there is a very focused exploration, with the same concept in five lessons. One secondary teacher said that LD is harder for lower ability students because conceptual links are harder to grasp than facts.

The less able find it difficult to grasp. It's difficult to make the leap of how belief impacts on the life of believers. Difficult to say 'If I believed in this how would it affect my behaviour.'

23. The learning cycle and students' voices

Twelve teachers across the phases said that there is space in the cycle for what the students think. They said that the purpose of learning is not recall, but 'what do you think about...' and that this approach values students' ideas. They commented that you can start the learning process from where the students are. This raises students' motivation, participation, and attainment.

The students engage more because they have an opportunity in a structured way to comment and evaluate. This has got to have raised attainment. It also clarifies what you're evaluating. The students enquire into religious viewpoints on something and know they will have a chance to comment.

The child is in the middle of everything. This is the key thing. Nothing the child says is wrong. The pupils have a voice, because there is space in the cycle for what they think.

The teachers are now actually hearing what the children are saying and what they think.

Children achieve because of the variety of activities, because it's about how concepts affect them in their lives, and their views on things.

The pupils are involved and receptive because they know they will be listened to. Exploring what children think is an inherent part of the cycle. My pupils don't worry about what they say – LD has made that difference.

One secondary teacher commented that Living Difference is a framework for teachers, to allow students to lead in their learning.

The students drive the lesson. The teacher can let go and allow the lesson to run. Teachers have confidence because LD is the framework that keeps the cycle of learning moving, keeps the lesson rigorous. Less experienced teachers using LD know that once

the students are gripped, they know how to control it. They know how to steer it to make sure outcomes are achieved without stopping students and getting them back to the teacher pre-planned stuff. LD allows teachers to have the confidence to allow the students to lead.

24. The impact of LD on teaching

Six primary phase teachers and all seven secondary teachers said that the learning cycle and the fact that LD is concept-led enable teachers to focus more clearly on their objectives and methods – what they are teaching the students and how the students are going to get there.

The fact the LD is concept-driven, and having a particular methodology: it does drive your planning. You make sure those elements are in your planning. Whereas before you think 'Oh, that's a nice little activity'. It tightens it up. Dots the 'i's, crosses the 't's. Have I, am I addressing the cycle in this? Keeps it tight, keeps it focussed. LD tightens the whole thing of what would make an outstanding lesson; it helps to bring it all together.

LD tells you how to get there. It's a way of doing, not just an 'intention' and you have to reinvent the wheel.

Five teachers made the point that using Living Difference brings teachers within a department or school onto a similar level.

Five teachers said that their expectations are higher. One Key Stage 2 teacher said that this is because planning is very specific. Two secondary teachers said that this was because the students are dealing with concepts and one also mentioned the skills set out in LD.

The expectations of teachers have risen because we're dealing with concepts for the first time. Conceptual development is a whole different field from just acquiring knowledge. Because you're being asked to use the content to make a point about the concept.

Four teachers commented that LD encourages more varied and experiential activities. This extends some teachers' repertoires and uses more of their strengths.

Three teachers said that thought Living Difference had enabled teachers to listen more to their students.

Two Key Stage 1 teachers said that teachers feel more confident and can go into more depth in what they are teaching because they understand the concept and there is not so much subject knowledge.

Two teachers valued what they saw as having a 'neutral standpoint' in relation to the religious material.

Two teachers said that Living Difference is self-evaluative, it helps teachers assess their teaching.

LD is self-evaluative. If the Evaluation element is not deep enough that means the Contextualisation is not deep enough, hasn't raised sufficient issues that are going to cause real problems that need solving by the kids. When you've got that right, there is that depth. It's very clear when you have done a cycle that's worked better than another. Very diagnostic.

One Key Stage 1 teacher commented that '*LD has enabled me to think about planning in a new way. It has become something special in my learning as a teacher.*'

25.The clarity of learning objectives

Eight teachers said that LD had enabled them to clarify their learning objectives. This is because the planning is more specific and the five elements of the learning cycle focus teachers on the learning objectives.

Two teachers commented that the learning cycle ensures that all activities are purposeful and have an RE purpose.

One teacher commented that the concept gives a distance between the teacher and contentious material. Students are focusing on the concept and not on whether they do or don't believe a given religious idea.

26.Students' responses to LD

Seven teachers commented on students' responses to Living Difference. Four said that the students are very enthusiastic. One commented that the students like the critical enquiry framework. One commented that the students now see purpose and value in discussion work. One commented that the students gain confidence from the similar format of all lessons. One commented that both able and less able children feel that RE challenges them. One said that the students like RE because Living Difference gives them ownership and independence of learning.

27.One Attainment Target

Four teachers commented on having one attainment target. All were positive. Three said that they were much clearer about what to assess. One said that there was less to assess. One said that one attainment target integrated religion and life.

One AT is great. There is less for colleagues to have to assess. LD contains the 2 ATs of the Framework. With one AT and the tight methodology you're only assessing one thing, or five within one thing.

AT1 and AT2 – that awful dilemma – ‘What do I assess – is it this or is it that and what level are they?’ Now it’s so clear. It’s all there in the same thing, you don’t have to worry, it’s a holistic approach. AT1 and 2 were a nightmare.

Training and its impact on teachers’ use of Living Difference

28.Training and its impact on teachers’ use of Living Difference

Four kinds of training were mentioned by the interviewees: steering groups of teachers and advisory teachers which produce units of work for the syllabus handbooks; development groups which are termly regional meetings of teachers and advisory teachers; day courses run by advisory teachers to help teachers implement LD; and advisory teachers giving support and advice to individual teachers.

Fifteen of the teachers were in development groups. Nine, across the key stages, were on steering groups and/or involved in training other teachers. Three of these (one Key Stage 2 and two secondary) were Advanced Skills Teachers. Day training courses were mentioned by two Key Stage 2 teachers, four Key Stage 1 teachers, but no secondary teachers. One of the secondary teachers and nine of the primary phase teachers had had individual support and advice from the advisory teachers. One of the secondary teachers had had Initial Teacher Training using Living Difference.

Sixteen teachers across the key stages said that discussing ideas with other teachers was helpful in the development groups and steering groups. Two (one secondary and one Key Stage 1) commented that it was particularly helpful to discuss the ‘how’, not just the ‘what’ of teaching.

Nine teachers across the key stages said that participation in the steering and development groups was a very important factor in helping them to understand and implement Living Difference.

Clive dropped a bombshell. It was a hell of a lot of hard work. But worth doing.

It seemed like a long time getting to grips with LD. But then it came together.

If I had to write stuff alone that would be hard, after one day’s training.

Eleven teachers across the key stages said that the input of the advisory teachers, both individually and in the development groups, was helpful in understanding and implementing LD.

Judith produced clear level descriptors and checked my plans. Clive and Judith are very supportive. They put on courses. The school could pay a bit and get ongoing email contact with Judith. She is very efficient, responds fast, and gives very positive feedback. All this helps me to feel confident.

One Key Stage 1, one Key Stage 2, and two secondary teachers said that it was easy to understand Living Difference. One of these also commented that it was helpful in the first year of implementation to be able to email Judith Lowndes. Another commented that understanding the process was easy, but *'it's hard to insert the concept and the material'*. One secondary teacher taught on an Initial Teacher Training course and explained the training:

The easiest way to train is to say 'Start with the concept. What is it about this concept that we want them to understand?' and work backwards. Identify the starting point and work round the cycle. If you say 'Today we're going to contextualise' you're giving them the objective of the lesson. Some student teachers have been in schools where they don't do Living Difference well or not explicitly. I'm taking them from scratch [saying] here's how we do it. And they're like 'It's so easy'.

Five primary phase teachers mentioned that it was useful that the development and steering groups produce units of work that teachers can go away and use.

One Key Stage 1 and one Key Stage 2 teacher said that the development groups were useful to find out about what was going on in other key stages.

One secondary teacher said that before Living Difference was introduced she had wanted to employ Accelerated Learning and higher order thinking skills in her teaching. When Living Difference came in, she saw that it teaches learning skills and was *'on exactly the same track'*.

Conclusion

The impact of Living Difference on planning

Living Difference has changed the way that these teachers are planning RE and teachers see this as a positive change. Three things are new. Firstly, teachers are planning units of work around concepts and these provide a clear focus for intended learning outcomes. Secondly, teachers are planning using the learning cycle. This specifies the 'how' of learning – what students actually do with the concept. It enables teachers to plan in more detail and with greater clarity the whole process of learning. Thirdly, teachers are using the level descriptors to clarify the skills that students use in their learning. They are using the level descriptors to map more clearly students' progress in acquiring new learning skills.

Just under two thirds of the sample recognised the skills and concepts pedagogical framework of Living Difference and, though it was a big change to their planning, have speedily made that change. In other cases the embedding of Living Difference has been a more gradual process.

All but three teachers were using the level descriptors. Where they were not, teachers still felt clear in their planning of individual units of work. This was because LD clearly set out the process of learning and because these teachers could use units of work from the handbooks and units produced in the development groups.

In teachers' comments about planning using the learning cycle, points came up in particular about the Contextualise and Evaluate elements of the cycle.

Teachers made three main points about Contextualise. Firstly, it has to be deep and stimulating enough to drive Evaluate. Depth at Contextualise enables students to evaluate the concept at a deeper level: students have a deeper and richer appreciation of the significance of the concept in that context. Secondly, Contextualise involves higher order thinking skills. Contextualise needs to involve an active application of the concept in that context. Only then can the students successfully evaluate the importance of the concept in that context. Not all the teachers were using higher order thinking skills in Contextualise. Thirdly, the context you choose is an important element in progression. The context in which you present a concept can raise more or less complex issues. The context therefore affects the skills that students need to analyse the concept.

Thus the work in Contextualise is having an effect on attainment in the Evaluate, Communicate, and Apply elements of the learning cycle. Evaluate works well when Contextualise has been deep, stimulating, at an appropriate level of complexity, and involves higher order thinking skills.

Evaluate can be challenging to plan. You need to know the right sorts of questions to ask. Living Difference clarifies what teachers are trying to do with questions: to enable the students to evaluate the concept from within the religious framework and beyond the religious framework. However, it can be challenging to set questions which enable the students to do this. It is important for teachers to analyse a concept in depth before planning a unit of work, in order to see how it might be interpreted in a secular context. Some teachers were doing this consciously. Some were doing it without commenting overtly on the process (for example in the unit on Angels). Some were not unpacking the concept sufficiently for the students to be able to evaluate the concept's significance beyond the religious framework.

In terms of planning for the abilities of all children, varied conclusions emerge. Living Difference gives more scope for more children to achieve. It encourages the use of a wide range of learning activities because it separates out the learning process. The Communicate and Apply elements in particular encourage teachers to listen in discussion to what students are saying. Living Difference also requires more demanding thinking skills when students to apply a concept in another context and some teachers felt this could be difficult for lower ability students. The specific activities teachers set have an impact on how far students are able to achieve and teachers still have to find ways of engaging all students.

There were numerous responses to the question of resourcing Living Difference. All said that it was less textbook-based. Some saw this as liberating, some as more of a challenge. Living Difference demands a depth of thinking through questions, materials, and activities. The majority of units used by most of the teachers were from the syllabus handbooks and/or developed in collaboration with other teachers at syllabus development groups.

The impact of Living Difference on measuring progression

Living Difference is having positive impact on measuring progression. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, it separates out one learning objective for each element of the cycle. Thus teachers are clear about what it is that they are assessing at any one time. They are assessing a student's ability to enquire, or contextualise, or evaluate and so on. Secondly, the level descriptors give a clear skill progression. They state one skill, such as 'describe' or 'explain'. These are the intended learning outcomes. The students and the teachers therefore understand more clearly than before what progression means.

A level now means something to them. They know the skills required to move up a level.

The concept hierarchy was being used by all teachers to plan progression. The concept hierarchy is a more general conception of progression. It does not pinpoint individual students' progress but guides the planning of units across key stages. Some teachers were relating the concept hierarchy to the complexity of the context and to students' developmental stages.

Moderation was still difficult, but easier than it would otherwise be, because Living Difference specifies the skill required for a student to demonstrate attainment at a particular level.

The impact of LD on assessing attainment

Assessment is easier and more reliable using Living Difference, for three reasons. Firstly, you assess each element of the learning cycle separately. Secondly, assessment and teaching are dovetailed – you teach in the same way that you assess and therefore the aims of assessment are clearer for students and for teachers. Thirdly, teachers are using a wider range of assessment methods than they had done before, because the learning process separates out elements of learning and invites a wider range of activities. This enables students to show achievement, who previously might not have done.

Some of those children who never write anything down have astounded me...LD embraces all children, all children's skills, and gives every child a voice.

Having one Attainment Target improves assessment. The Attainment Target in Living Difference has a one to one correspondence with the learning process. Teachers know they are addressing the Attainment Target when they follow the five steps of the learning process. They assess just one aspect of learning at each stage of the learning cycle. Intended learning outcomes are the skills students use to enquire into, contextualise, evaluate, communicate, and apply the concept and thus 'interpret religion in relation to human experience'. This is why assessment is easier and more reliable using Living Difference than in these teachers' previous experience.

The impact of LD on attainment in RE

All the teachers felt that the focus on ideas, skills, and students' voices in Living Difference improved students' attainment in RE and their enthusiasm and participation. Teachers pointed specifically to eight reasons why they felt that Living Difference raised students' attainment.

1. The concept focuses the students on the meanings in the religious material they are studying – it gives significance to the material and purpose to their learning. In Contextualise students have the opportunity to use higher order thinking skills - to select what is significant in the material in relation to the concept. This stimulates students' own ideas and questions. Students are able to take away from their learning just one really meaningful thing, the concept, rather than lots of bits of information.
2. The concept links students' experience with the religious material. It enables students to have a grasp of religious material which is beyond their own experience.
3. Living Difference teaches students learning and thinking skills. It sets out the process of learning. It gives students the skills necessary to understand and use ideas. When students learn at the level of ideas they can apply their learning more broadly. It equips students with the learning skills to achieve at a higher level at GCSE and gives students a depth of reflection which is beyond the requirements of GCSE.
4. Living Difference enables students to build more effectively on previous learning, because they can see how their learning skills are progressing, and because they can make links at the level of concepts between current and previous learning.
5. Living Difference gives students more scope to achieve, for two reasons. Firstly, the elements of the learning process are assessed separately and students can be good at some skills and not others. Secondly, rich concepts and the separating out of each element of the learning cycle encourage a wider range of activities than before.
6. The learning cycle gives space to and therefore values the students' voices. Students engage more deeply with their learning because their own ideas are an integral part of the learning process. Communicate and Apply can challenge and liberate the students and connect their experience with the religious material.
7. Living Difference has a positive impact on teaching. Living Difference gives teachers a pedagogy, a model of how students learn. This helps teachers to support students' learning. *'Teachers who develop through using this develop a confidence that's not going to be eroded.'* Teachers' expectations of students are higher, because Living Difference sets out higher order thinking skills that students should be using. Activities are more varied and experiential.
8. The concept and the learning cycle make clear to teachers and to students what is being learned. Learning is purposeful because at every stage of the learning cycle intended

learning outcomes are clear. Where the learning cycle, the concept, and the level descriptors are being used together, this ensures that all activities have an RE purpose.

Training and its impact on teachers' use of LD

The development groups, the steering groups, and the work of the RE advisors have an important role in helping teachers deliver Living Difference. While some teachers found it easy to understand Living Difference – *'it's not rocket science'* – some nevertheless found the groups and the support of advisors helpful in actually planning schemes of work, as creating units of work is more in-depth than simply understanding Living Difference. In the development and steering groups teachers are finding it helpful to plan and talk about units of work with other teachers. For some, it is also helpful just to have time to digest Living Difference and clear up any misconceptions. Only a small minority of teachers have written all or nearly all units of work on their own, but many have co-created units in collaboration with other teachers. Teachers are also using units created by other people and adapting them. This is easy to do, since all the units share the same process.

Concluding comments

This research indicates that Living Difference can facilitate significantly more effective teaching and successful learning in RE in a number of ways. However, this is not happening fully in all cases and the implementation of Living Difference needs some further development.

Living Difference is an enabling framework. It supports teachers' planning. The concept and the process of learning make clear what the aim of learning is and how to get there. Learning is therefore purposeful for students and this raises attainment.

Living Difference enables teachers and students to see attainment and progression. Teachers assess one aspect of learning at a time and this is consistent across units of work. The specific skill progression in the level descriptors makes clear what students have achieved and what they need to do next to progress.

Living Difference sets out how to enable students to learn at a higher order level. Students are investigating and applying concepts at every stage in the process of learning. This enables a far higher level of attainment than students were reaching before Living Difference.

Living Difference engages students in their learning. The concept links the religious material and students' ideas and experience and thus makes learning relevant and meaningful. Students' own voices are integral in the learning process. Students have more opportunities to achieve in a variety of ways.

The findings suggest that the following are areas for further development.

1. Teachers need more exemplars of evaluative questions they can use in units of work. They need examples of the kinds of question format which will help students to evaluate the concept.
2. Teachers need a formula, a technique, to help them unpack concepts. They need more guidance in analysing concepts, in order to be able to see their significance beyond the religious context.
3. Teachers need support to integrate the level descriptors into their planning; specifically, to see that the level descriptors dovetail with teaching as intended learning outcomes.
4. Teachers need support to plan Contextualise. They need to be able to plan Contextualise in terms of higher order thinking skills. Students actively investigate the significance of the concept in the context, in order to evaluate its significance. Contextualise is not just the bit where you put the 'learning about religions'.

Arising from the findings of this research are questions for RE nationally.

Is Living Difference a pedagogical model which could underpin the National Framework for RE and RE in the secondary and now primary curriculum reviews? Living Difference is entirely compatible with the intentions for RE set out in these documents and supplies the 'how' of how to realise those intentions. Teachers in this sample valued the fact that Living Difference does give the 'how': a process of learning and not just the intention. As one interviewee commented, *'It's a way of doing, not just an intention and you have to reinvent the wheel'*.

Does Living Difference provide the model for learning in RE most appropriate in a curriculum led by concepts and skills? Is it more appropriate to RE than other models of learning because, specifically, it provides an approach to religious concepts and a process of analysing them?

Is one Attainment Target better than two in practice? Should RE practitioners see the concepts of 'learning about' and 'learning from' as helpful in having moved us beyond confessional RE, but unwieldy when applied to assessment in practice? 'Learning about' and 'learning from' inform an understanding of the subject at a general philosophical level. Living Difference is not incompatible with that general conception of RE. Assessment in the Living Difference model, however, is grounded in the learning process. The learning process sets out one way in which you can 'interpret religion in relation to human experience'. There is one intended learning outcome at each stage in the learning process. Through these intended learning outcomes students attain the attainment target. Teachers are clearer than they were before about whether they are addressing the attainment target in their assessment, because they are only assessing one thing at a time and because the attainment target and the learning process together form one indivisible whole.

Does Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development need to give greater emphasis to learning theory? Should they give teachers opportunities explicitly to try out pedagogical approaches in practice? This could enable teachers to have a much greater critical command of the 'how' of learning, across the subjects. Students are learning to learn, in a skills- and concepts-led curriculum. Teachers can only facilitate students' learning to learn if they are clear about the processes of learning.

Should all Agreed Syllabi provide a pedagogical framework like Living Difference does? Planning and implementing effective RE is challenging for teachers. Living Difference sets out good practice systematically at a pedagogical level and thereby supports teachers in their good practice.

LD tightens the whole thing of what would make an outstanding lesson; it helps to bring it all together

And if Agreed Syllabi provide underpinning guidance at a pedagogical level, should Local Authorities and/or other institutions support training of the kind which is going on in Hampshire, in the development groups and the steering groups and the work of the advisors? Teachers in this sample overwhelmingly benefitted from their training. Their students have hugely benefitted as a result. Can we afford to do less if we want quality RE which enables our young people to realise their abilities?