As an RE teacher trainer, I often visit schools and observe lessons, and what I find is that at the heart of all good learning is making sure that each lesson enables students to make progress. That progress is greatly improved when the lesson builds on what students already know, and when they have opportunities to self-assess, peer-assess, and reflect on their learning. It's important that we try to build this into all our lessons, so I thought I'd share with you some questions that I use with teacher trainees.

When you plan lessons, ask yourself:

- What do the students already know? Where is their thinking about this topic or theme? What questions would they bring? Can I tweak my activities to ensure they build on learning and take their knowledge further?

- Does each activity really show me how students have progressed and what they have achieved? Getting this right will make it much easier to track student progress throughout a lesson.

- Have I communicated clearly with the students the criteria against which their work is assessed?

- Have I built in opportunities for them to assess their own work and each other’s work? We want to put aside some time in each lesson for students to assess themselves and one another, so that they can collectively understand what they have learned, and be empowered by their new skills and knowledge.

There are many published resources available to help you implement good RE, but recently I've been involved with developing a new approach called Living Faiths. The Living Faiths series challenges students to develop three approaches to exploring RE, and encourages them to assess their own progression.

- Firstly, it encourages students to think inside and around the theological concepts that frame the different religious experiences in people’s lives by explaining various case study families’ beliefs and practices.

- Secondly, it encourages them to think about ultimate philosophical questions by understanding fundamental questions that different faiths are seeking to address, and by reflecting on their own opinions to those questions.

- Thirdly, it encourages them to undertake their own research in their classes and find out about the thoughts of other students in the class: what does my neighbour believe and how do I interpret what they do and say?

RE is made up of all three of these elements, and Living Faiths tries to embed tasks throughout that challenge students to stretch themselves in these different ways of thinking. We've called these:

- 'think like a theologian'
- 'think like a philosopher'
- 'think like a social scientist'

Best wishes,

Bob Bowie

RE Consultant

Read the next newsletter for Bob’s advice on ‘How to Encourage RE Students to Reflect on Their Own and Other’s Viewpoints’.