

Physical movement within RE – looking at Salah

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Purpose

- To incorporate RE and physical movement.
- To develop a compelling learning experience for students, using 'learn to learn'.
- To deepen student understanding of the practice and importance of prayer in Islam.

Main emphasis

The nature of this lesson incorporates the use of physical movement within RE. The key concepts under investigation were *practices and ways of life* and *'identity, diversity and belonging'*. The learning experiences within this topic covered a range of 'learn to learn' strategies. We hoped the lesson would be more 'compelling' for students in that it would engage their imagination and present them with an authentic experience which would challenge their own views and extend their understanding of others.

In order to ensure that students would make progress in their learning, we devised a key question for them to focus on: *'What can be learnt about Muslim practices and identity through physically learning the positions and movements for daily prayer?'*

School profile

Total number of learners	1,161
Age range	11-18
Specialist status	Visual and Performing Arts College
Level 5 and above in key stage 3 English test	89%
Five A*-C at GCSE (2006)	62%
Special educational needs with statements	39
Special educational needs without statements	154 (13.5%)

South Wirral High School is a larger than average secondary modern school and is a specialist Visual and Performing Arts college serving an area of considerable social and economic deprivation.

The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above average. Students' standards on entry to the school are below average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is close to average but the proportion with a statement of special educational need is above average. There are fewer than usual students from minority ethnic backgrounds with no specific groups of significant size. None is at an early stage of learning English.

Over recent years, the school has gone through a period of extensive rebuilding. In 2007 we produced a new revised Wirral Agreed Syllabus, so as to be in line with the non-statutory national framework for RE.

Question 1: What were we trying to achieve?

The starting point: Identifying the priorities for development

What were our learners like at the start?

Our learners are used to various 'learn to learn' strategies within lessons and therefore are used to being pushed out of their comfort zones. This helps as many students are not afraid to try new ideas within the classroom and are ready to take on what first appears to be a challenge.

What differences did we want to see in our learners?

This was a lesson where we wanted students to learn about Muslim prayer as an enactment of their spirituality. There were no Muslims in the class and this can be a very dry lesson, where students look at pictures of people praying. We wanted students to become involved in the process of salah, to remember the experience and to deepen their understanding of prayer in Islam.

The lesson would cover the following key concepts:

- Practices and ways of life – exploring the impact of religions and beliefs on how people live their lives (AT1);
- Identity, diversity and belonging – understanding how individuals develop a sense of identity and belonging through faith or belief (AT2).

In terms of *knowledge, understanding and skills*, we wanted students to know the sequence of prayer positions in Islam and to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of prayer to Muslims. We also wanted them to develop their ability to work together.

In terms of *attitudes and behaviour*, we particularly wanted students to reflect on Muslim beliefs, practices and ways of life and some ways in which they are expressed. In addition we wanted students to become increasingly sensitive to some aspects of Muslim religion and culture through a learning technique involving physical movement.

Topics such as this are always a challenge to cover as many of our students proclaim to be atheist in their views, and therefore question why they have to learn about people's beliefs. Looking at Muslim prayer is always controversial as there are always some students who initially come across as prejudiced in their views due to the media. These help to make this an interesting case study to address.

Question 2: How did we organise learning to achieve our aims?

How did we set about making a change?

The changes we wanted to make to our approach to teaching and learning involved much more of a focus on the key concepts recommended in the non-statutory framework. We also wanted to

establish a more collaborative approach which would make this lesson far more engaging and imaginative.

We wanted to focus mainly on *'practices and ways of life'* and *'identity, diversity and belonging'*. We also wanted to use all we had learnt about 'learn to learn' and disseminate this through to the students. Our school is very much centred on MFL but we wanted to extend how we tackled this. We wanted to focus on both subject knowledge and physical movement under the heading of: *'What can be learnt about Muslim practices and identity through physically learning the positions and movements for daily prayer?'*

We are a mixed school, so before the lesson where the physical exercise was to take place, we prepared students by discussing the question of having separate areas for boys and girls for the prayer activity and the reasons Muslims might give for conducting prayer separately for men and women. The class decided that on this occasion the activity could take place with boys and girls together, though none would be compelled to participate, We also let the girls know that they might feel more comfortable in trousers.

We also noted that had there been any students who could not physically take part, they could have sat on chairs and taken part in any positions they could manage.

Students already had a previous knowledge of wudu so this would link to the knowledge and understanding to be gained in this lesson.

For the actual lesson, students arrived to hear the call to prayer and a picture of a mosque on the interactive whiteboard. They were asked to say what was going on and give any details they already knew.

Students were then given either a picture or some text; either a picture of one of the positions of salah or information about each prayer position. Students had to find the partner who had been given the corresponding picture or text as them, and when they had done this they were asked to work out where in the sequence of prayer their picture and text might go. In order to do this they had to use their powers of deduction and see if there were any clues included in their picture or text. We then discussed as a class why it might be that order and how they had deduced that.

We then looked at a Muslim man performing salah on the interactive whiteboard, and students rearranged themselves into the correct order. We then went around the class as students in turn told us what was happening in their picture and the significance behind it.

Students were then invited to perform the prayer positions in the correct order. All had a go. They then discussed what they had learnt from this exercise, and what they had learnt about salah from the whole lesson.

The lesson had opportunity throughout each section for students to continuously evaluate their progress and what they were learning. There was opportunity at the end of the lesson to evaluate what they had learnt through the lesson.

Within the scheme of work there will be opportunity to see how well this has worked, in order to help students with remembering salah and the importance of it. This lesson could be done both at KS3 and KS4; in this KS4 example, links were made to both religious experience illustrated by prayer and how God may be revealed through prayer.

Question 3: How well have we achieved our aims?

What differences are evident? What impact will we have made on our learners?

Students were more engaged in their class work and we hope that the standard of homework will rise with the introduction of more of these creative and imaginative tasks. Students are more inclined to attend the lessons as they want to be part of these activities.

Students are even more aware of their being able to move out of their comfort zone and always to expect the unexpected. Many saw the benefits of learning through physical movement and want to use the techniques for other topics and subjects.

Students worked with students that they don't normally work with, which should help their social skills.

They also deepened their understanding of the two key concepts we had identified as a focus for their learning. They became aware of the significance of each prayer position in Muslim practice and the importance of prayer in Muslim identity. They also considered the challenges of belonging to a religion today, including the challenge of maintaining religious practice as a minority community.