

## **Where is God?**

Year 9

### **Purpose**

The project aimed to combine learning in Religious Education and Art in the following ways:

Religious Education

The Religious Education scheme of work encourages students to think about how people express their understanding of God. It examines the symbolism used within religious and non religious art to express God. It examines this not only from a subject knowledge basis through exploration of symbolism and meaning but also in exploring methods by which we can express our spirituality. The scheme of work utilises art as a medium to explore the changes in religious expression over the years, beginning with the geometric artwork of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century early Islamic art, ranging through to the Christian 'story telling' of the Renaissance period with its images of judgement and hell to the modern expression spirituality within contemporary art.

Art

The Art scheme of work encourages students to create a personal expression of their understanding of what God might be like. This scheme of work is written in conjunction by Plashet School Art department and took place within the Art department.

Students' work will be assessed and provide evidence of towards a level of attainment for Religious Education and a National Curriculum level for Art.

### **Main assessment focus:**

For this assessment, the focus is to develop students' knowledge and understanding of the following key concepts:

- 1.3 Expressing meaning
- 1.5 Meaning, Purpose and Truth

## Main 'Learning Outside the Classroom' Focus

Several aspects of the project involved learning outside the classroom. Firstly, the project involved a visit by an artist to the school. He spoke about how he expresses his belief through his art. However in future, students will attend the artists' studio where they will be able to speak with the artist in his own environment.

Secondly, one of the lessons involved a walk into Plashet Park where students were first asked to sit alone in silence (in the sunshine!) and reflect on the question 'Where is God?'. They were then asked to explore the environment and list three things that a person might view as evidence of God on earth.

Finally, it was felt that a visit to a gallery would have been appropriate for this task. However unfortunately we were unable to take students out of school on this occasion.

## School profile

Total number of learners	1352
Age range	11-16
Specialist status	Science Specialist
Level 5 and above in key stage 3 tests (2007)	70%
Five A*-C at GCSE (2007)	72%
Special educational needs	5.4%

Plashet School is larger than many other secondary schools nationally. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those whose first language is not English is very high. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above the national average while the proportion of girls with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Plashet has been a specialist Science college since September 2007. At Key Stage 3, the Religious Education department follow the 'Newham Agreed Syllabus'. In Key Stage 4 all students study for GCSE (short course), with a focus on Islam and Christianity.

## Question 1: What are we trying to achieve?

We wanted to focus a unit of work specifically around the more creative aspects of Religious Education. We were aware that we use a lot of religious art and images across Key Stage Three and felt that it would be an excellent conclusion to the key stage if students were able to produce their own piece of representative art. We were inspired by the work produced in the NATRE 'Spirited Arts' competition. [www.natre.org.uk/spritedarts](http://www.natre.org.uk/spritedarts)

### What were our learners like at the start?

Religious Education in the school is skills based and utilises the levels of attainment. The progress of students in Religious Education is monitored closely. In the Key Stage Three baseline skills test, most students begin working at levels below the national average, however most students progress into key stage 4 working at a level 6 or above. This is reflected in the GCSE short course results which stand at 88% A\*-C. However, we were finding that motivation was at its lowest towards the second half of Year 9, continuing into Year 10. We were aware that our students particularly enjoy creative work (art is extremely popular within the school). It was hoped that the experience of learning outside the classroom coupled with a creative assignment would raise motivation prior to Key Stage 4.

### What differences did we want to see in our learners?

### What knowledge and understanding you wanted them to acquire?

We wanted students to be able to represent their beliefs about where they might find God through art. We considered that students would be able to explore this in a variety of different ways; however we were keen for them to develop their analytical skills in reading art.

### What skills did you want students to develop?

- **Reflection** – To be able to contemplate how they felt and explore their feelings in relation to the question ‘where is God?’
- **Enquiry** – To find out about the faith and extend their knowledge and understanding of what it is like to be a Muslim or a Christian from artwork inspired by faith
- **Interpretation**– To be able to suggest a range of meanings for the symbolism within the pieces of art shown to them
- **Analysis** – To consider what an artist is trying to say about their faith within their artwork
- **Reasoning** – To be able to support their piece of representative art with explanation and justification
- **Synthesis** – To be able to identify the similarities and differences in religious expression and to be able to recognise the shared values and ideas in respect to different beliefs represented
- **Communication** – To be able to express their understanding and learning clearly through the assessment task. To be able to use the key vocabulary picked up within the unit appropriately and independently.

### **What attitudes and behaviours you wanted them to develop?**

- Self awareness – feeling confident about their own beliefs and sharing them without fear of embarrassment or ridicule
- Open-mindedness – developing skills of listening and a willingness to learn from others, even when others' views are different from their own
- Appreciation and wonder – developing their imagination and curiosity

### **Question 2: How will we organise learning to achieve our aims?**

#### **Key question: Where is God?**

#### **Key concepts:**

- 1.3. Forms of expression
- 1.5 Meaning, Purpose and Truth

Art is clearly a way by which an individual or group of persons might express their beliefs and faith. This provides a link with the key concepts that underpin RE according to the non-statutory programmes of study for RE in the revised secondary curriculum list above. We wanted to develop student's understanding of how religious expression is unique to individuals and how religious expression has also changed throughout the ages.

We needed to consider:

- a) what we were doing in the way of effective transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4?
- b) how could we engage de-motivated students at this transitional, interim stage and raise achievement?
- c) how could we incorporate 'Learning outside of the classroom' ?

We evaluated our teaching and learning and identified the different types of activities that we felt engaged students in Year 9. On this basis we were keen to incorporate stimulus materials, group work, discussion, enquiry and creative work.

We had identified that students at Plashet School generally enjoyed using art as a medium and felt that this was a particularly appropriate route for some inter-disciplinary work with the art department.

We had to work hard with the art the department to ensure that students could identify how they were making progress in RE and similarly in Art. We also needed them to understand what we were expecting as outcomes at the end of the project.

We decided to keep target levels separate in both subjects and mark using our own individual criteria.

We agreed on a common format for setting student targets and breaking down level descriptors. We felt that this was important if students were to identify the interdisciplinary nature of the project and apply their understanding from RE to the work they were completing in art.

We were very aware of the fantastic opportunities with the 2008 curriculum to work across the different curriculum areas. The art department and RE dept have always been very close at Plashet School, but have never explicitly produced a project whereby we were formally aware of the work done in each others classrooms. This project was a great opportunity to focus upon the excellent work in RE on religious expression and the excellent teaching and learning in art.

The project ran over the course of 8 weeks in RE and 12 weeks in art. RE had one lesson (50mins per week) and art two lessons per week. The RE teacher was able to attend the art classes at the start of the 12 week art unit to work with the students on the transition between the RE and the art scheme of work.

### **Question 3: How well have we achieved our aims?**

The interactive nature of the activities meant that students became more engaged. There was some resistance by a small minority of students to begin with, however with gentle coaxing and encouragement they became involved. The key to the success of the project was to inject some enthusiasm and passion back into to students at what can be a difficult stage of their school career. We felt that the stimulus using artwork, a competition at the end of the project, the possibility of having their canvases displayed across school and of being outside of the school environment achieved this aim. Students were clearly more animated and engaged by using this stimulus. The investigative nature of the scheme of work meant that students began to enquire again and ask questions or attempt to work things out.

Students were made aware of the assessment task at the beginning of the unit. At all points the success criteria were referred to not only in terms of the immediate lesson, but also in terms of the overall scheme of work. Knowing what they were expected to achieve in the assessment task meant that students were consistently able to relate their learning to the assessment activity during the unit. The advantage of this was that students were able to understand the reasons why we were delivering the lessons in this way.

Ultimately it is too early to tell whether this has had a big effect on easing the transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4. However I feel that the attitudes being

demonstrated by the current Year 9 at this stage of the academic year appear to be more positive than in recent previous years – I hope that they maintain this outlook when they reach Year 10. Trends in the Year 10 exam results can be utilised to measure the success.

### **What evidence did we produce?**

Presentations  
Student worksheets  
Scheme of Work  
Learning objectives shared with students  
Focused questioning strategies  
'I can' statements