

## Responses to injustice

### Moat Community College: Leila Hedges

#### Purpose

- To help students understand how and why people respond to injustice.
- To give students the opportunity to respond to a current issue.

#### Main emphasis

The main emphasis of this work was to study the motivation behind people's actions and to reflect on different types of responses. Students then evaluated whether individuals can make change happen.

#### School profile

Total number of learners	1,050
Age range	11-16
Specialist status	Science
Level 5 and above in key stage 3 tests (2007)	62%
Five A*-C at GCSE (2007)	49%
Special educational needs	23%

Our school is a mixed 11-16 comprehensive serving the densely populated inner city area of Highfields in the city of Leicester. It is in an area of severe social and economic deprivation with 39% of the students eligible for free school meals. Over 95% of students are from ethnic minority backgrounds and speak English as their second language. Most students are Muslim but there are also students from other religious backgrounds and from none. We follow the Leicester City Agreed Syllabus, which has similar 'strands' to the key concepts of the non-statutory programme of study.

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

The department wanted to develop a compelling learning experience that helped students to understand examples of injustice in the world and to feel that they could make a difference. The sequence of lessons would involve students in making a real-life choice or inspiring them to action, thus engaging them in something we felt would inspire them and help them to see the relevance of RE to their lives.

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

Most of our students start KS3 working at below the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus but have an understanding of the importance of faith to themselves and to others. By year 9 most know how beliefs and actions may be linked and achieve a level 5. However

they do not often see the connection between their beliefs and their own actions and find it difficult to explain the wider impact of beliefs on actions. Many also think that people with no religious conviction are not moral. Some have a limited understanding of world issues and ideas such as slavery and interdependence whilst others have had first hand experiences which have led to them being in this country. Differences in understanding have led to misunderstandings and sometimes a feeling of negativity and powerlessness.

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

We wanted students to be able to study 'beliefs, teachings and sources' (concept A – AT1) in order to understand how they can be interpreted and sometimes in different ways. We also wanted students to understand that these could motivate action and affect people's moral values and choices. This would help them deepen their understanding of 'values and commitments' (concept F – AT2).

In terms of attitudes and behaviour, we wanted students to be able to reflect on and evaluate people's actions and attitudes so that they could start to question the world around them. We also wanted students to feel that their responses are valid and that they could make a difference, by presenting them with real dilemmas involving personal decisions about action that could be taken in response to instances of 'injustice'.

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

#### **How did we set about making a change?**

We wanted students to be more aware of examples of injustice both through class work and also through the news and things they had read about. The RE department designed wall displays containing information about current issues and also made students think about their perceptions, e.g. a wall of photographs and pictures and students had to work out who were the heroes or villains.

We then constructed a key question to focus students' learning and to link in with the key concepts we wanted them to investigate ('beliefs, teachings and sources' and 'values and commitments'). We came up with, *'Explain how and why people have responded to injustice in the world'*.

We increased the examples of responses to include people and organisations such as Mary Seacole, Camilo Torres and the Grameen Bank as well as more well-known people such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King. This made them think about 'injustice' in different forms and also to evaluate the effectiveness of different actions.

Students were taught through music, (e.g. Labi Siffre – 'Something Inside So Strong' and Sting – 'They Dance Alone'), video (Amnesty international), discussion and role-play (e.g. 'hot seating' a parent of a disappeared child), and games (e.g. Chocolate game from Christian Aid). These approaches helped students to get more involved with the ideas as a variety of learning styles were used. We also allowed more time for reflection and tried to help students to express their feelings and views, e.g. through circle time.

This was then developed further when studying modern day slavery when students were made to think about the decisions they make in their everyday lives, e.g. buying Fair Trade chocolate. We also drew on examples from the work of Christian Aid and Islamic Relief and so students had plenty of real examples to consider.

Students then were given the opportunity to respond to a current Amnesty International appeal. This presented them with a real decision to make: was this an appeal that they themselves wanted to participate in? What reasons would they give for responding to the appeal or not? This resulted in a very compelling learning experience for students as it involved them in making a real life choice about whether and how to respond to a reported instance of injustice and presented them with a personal decision that could make a real difference. In addition, the sequence of lessons covered all of the learning styles and allowed for structured reflection so students could express themselves more clearly. This also proved to be very engaging for all who took part.

Students were assessed by responding to our key question: *'Explain how and why people have responded to injustice in the world'*. They were encouraged to use different viewpoints and to back up their points with religious beliefs and other evidence. This linked in with the exam structure of the GCSE short course, which they start in the next term. This made the assessment shorter (and so more time could be spent on exploring the ideas) and allowed the students to explore and reflect on what they'd studied.

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

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

Students were more involved with the ideas and were keen to ask questions which were thoughtful and showed great empathy. The assessment showed most students had considered the ideas and were evaluating at a higher level than in previous work. They also remembered to justify their points with beliefs and teachings.

Students had the option of not participating with the Amnesty work but all chose to get involved. This was quite a surprise as in previous units there had been an element of apathy from some, and demonstrated just how engaging it was to present them with an opportunity to make a real decision about how to respond to reported injustice.

Students could remember and apply their knowledge to areas such as prejudice, discrimination and pacifism, which is studied later in the short course. They were also more confident about expressing points of view, including their own.

Overall, students seemed to enjoy this work and as they had done something 'real', and many said they had a feeling of pride that they had tried to make a difference.