

RE and Popular Culture

Objectives

At the end of this chapter you will have:

Reflected upon the possibilities of using resources from popular culture to enhance and inform your teaching practice.

Considered creative strategies that work in a range of learning contexts by effectively engaging all students on a variety of different levels:

Reviewed an evaluation cycle of your own pedagogy within a new framework that will give you the confidence to try out new and exciting ideas and modes of delivery.

In this chapter I will be reporting upon a range of radical classroom strategies that have enabled the integration of diverse religious ideas and concepts, have fused street culture with the insights of traditional expressions of faith, have exploited contemporary youth culture to increase the credibility of RE or have pushed the boundaries of learning within some challenging schools. The chapter will focus on strategies for individual trainees to work with within the dominant sub-cultural milieu of their placement school in the presentation of content, skills and attitudes that are central to the successful delivery of RE in a variety of different contexts. The activities presented will seek to use and to channel a lot of the creative potential presented by the presence of popular culture in the lives of young people today.

The starting point for much of what follows is the seminal book from the 1990s entitled *New Methods in R.E. Teaching: an Experiential Approach* by Hammond. This book exerted a particularly strong influence upon the teaching practice of many practitioners at a time when there was a degree of uncertainty about where RE should be heading or the direction that it should be taking. The book represented an assemblage of educational ideas from the late 1960's informed by psychological exploration, phenomenology and experiential learning. The contents of the text placed a strong emphasis upon taking well-managed risks in the classroom to connect with young people's own life experiences and thoughts with a strong emphasis upon building corridors of contact between young people's own life experiences and the experiences of a religious believer.

'In our view, any area of education requires the ability to appreciate what the world looks and feels like to other people whose experience of life is not the same as our own. This entering into the world of another person is inevitably difficult or even painful, particularly if that person also belongs to another culture. It involves admitting to ourselves that our own perspective is only one amongst many'. (Hammond 1990)

This is a central theme and thread that has permeated and coloured the work

undertaken both within and outside the classroom in the name of RE in recent years. The practical exemplars that follow are all taken from over nine years of teaching practice defined by and anchored to the need to innovate to survive and thrive in very challenging circumstances. The practical strategies that will be shared in this chapter will inevitably be quite personal and subjective but through these illustrations and examples it is hoped that you will begin to decide for yourself what is possible and what is not at this stage in your career and this is an exciting journey of personal discovery that never really ends or reaches conclusion.

The work of Hammond and Hay was and is revolutionary and instrumental in changing the way that RE was perceived, presented and taught based upon a very real need to repair the fracture between participant and subject. This was achieved by creating a range of strategies that make the subject content of RE relevant, enjoyable, life transforming and life affirming and this is now more needed today than ever before. If it is now possible to feel a degree of empathy towards a person of another faith or culture because of a series of positive interventions called Religious Education then this enterprise has succeeded in equipping each young person with a dazzling array of life transference skills that touch upon the heart of human experience. This is therefore a worthwhile and necessary enterprise and if we are to succeed in building conceptual and actual bridges of understanding across cultures then I would propose that RE has an absolutely central role to play in both social, cultural and community cohesion.

'...we passionately believe that it is the duty of all schools to address issues of 'how we live together' and 'dealing with difference' however controversial and difficult they might sometimes seem' The Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review February 2007

It is also quite interesting to think about the enhanced role that RE should and will play in this process when the extent to which a school is able to promote both social and cultural cohesion will form a new part of the inspection process. This will present a number of new challenges and opportunities for all educational institutions to meet this new duty and it is hoped that the status of RE within the curriculum will be further elevated and enhanced as a result (please refer to [HYPERLINK "http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/"](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/) www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/).

Recently in America there has emerged a radical voice of dissent against what is happening in the States in terms of educational change and reform and this has become known as 'Critical Pedagogy' (*after Freire*). This is an approach to education that encourages each student to become an aware and critical learner able to identify how they learn and how this can lead to empowerment and to the experience of liberating education. This means that individuals can use education to bring about social transformation on a collective level in terms of becoming more

conscious of how education can become a dynamic force for change and innovation.

'Within the next century, educators will not be able to ignore the hard questions that schools will have to face regarding issues of multiculturalism, race, identity, power, knowledge, ethics, and work. These issues will play a major role in defining the meaning and purpose of schooling, the relationship between teachers and students, and the critical content of their exchange in terms of how to live in a world that will be vastly more globalised, high tech, and racially diverse than at any other time in history' (Giroux 15, 1995)

The comments made by Henry Giroux the educational theorist are very relevant for the current chapter since he is suggesting that young people needed to be given the necessary 'narrative space' to develop and to become fully rounded, critical and aware human beings who actually think for themselves in a variety of different life contexts. Moreover given the gravity and the magnitude of the events that have unfolded and unraveled in the world in recent years it is now more important not less important that all young people become engaged in the search for their own truth above and beyond the one mediated by conservative agenda setters in both public and private life. However the idea of truth is no longer as complete and all compassing as it once was since we live within a time of fragmented and contested truth claims where many people feel they are set adrift in a meaningless world to find meaning for themselves. This is where again RE has a critical role to play in questioning the consensus by offering and by opening up possibilities of thought that are critical, aware and concerned with the dynamics of social change. In the USA religious education is not taught in the high school curriculum so it will be necessary to substitute the term 'cultural studies' for RE because I feel that a lot of what Giroux is saying is very relevant for the role of this subject in the modern school curriculum today. Giroux has also written extensively about the importance and relevance of using popular culture in accessing meaning in the classroom and as educationalists he has asserted that there are many points of contact between popular culture, the experiences of young people and in the creation of a curriculum that enshrines creativity and innovation. He goes on from this point to suggest that popular culture can be used as a way of invigorating and renewing the learning experiences we offer as educationalists to young people by connecting with their experiences and by going from the familiar into the unfamiliar where the learner is a willing and active agent. This is particularly important in creating young people who are independent thinkers and who see themselves as active participants in the construction of their own cultural identities and experiences.

'Within this postmodern culture of youth, identities merge and shift rather than become more uniform and static. No longer belonging to any one place or location, youth increasingly inhabit shifting cultural and social spheres marked by a plurality of languages and cultures' (Giroux 15, 1995)

The new starting point for this chapter will seek to combine the ideas articulated by Hammond and Hay in the 1990s with many of the ideas expressed by Henry Giroux based upon the importance of constructing conceptual points of contact between popular culture and critical thinking linked back to RE and its relevance to young people's lives and experiences today. The work of Hammond and Hay made explicit use of experiential teaching techniques that drew heavily upon phenomenological approaches to knowledge developed in the late 1960's and 1970's. This was all really taken from a rebirth in critical thinking that was concerned with human action theory and social interaction and the idea of accessing the intentions of the social actors involved in the construction of social meanings. This inevitably seeped through into RE teaching and became known as the experiential approach because it emphasised practical aspects of knowledge and knowing and also sought to develop a range of empathic skills and processes linked to the study of religion. This was an important development that led to the creation of a skills based rather than content heavy approach to RE teaching which was discredited in the late 1980s but has now returned to assume a central place in many new curriculum areas as all teachers are encouraged to innovate and to use a more student centered pedagogy in the classroom. A lot of the impetus for these changes stemmed from the work of Martin Gardner in his work on multiple intelligences. Also a rather neglected but equally important book to all practitioners of RE is Danah Zohar's *Spiritual Intelligence*. The author is a quantum physicist who rediscovered her Jewish faith through her study of quantum physics, which adds a ninth type of intelligence to the existing eight and is all about how individuals can use their spiritual intelligence to self-actualise and to self-realise and is of course central to all RE teaching. These ideas about multiple intelligence are now firmly embedded in contemporary pedagogy and students are now meant to be able to access their own learning as independent thinkers and learners through a diverse range of learning styles and types.

This chapter uses references from popular culture to inform its pedagogy because it is here that the lives of most young people are mediated. Their minds are inhabited by signs, symbols and points of contact from a cultural repository of ideas that can be tapped into and used in the classroom to create links and connections that will inspire and motivate young people to think, engage and to search for their own meanings about a range of complex life issues. Also there will be opportunities for young people to deepen their own knowledge of themselves and to look at experiences and ideas that are within popular culture in a completely different way.

Recently, much work on The Simpsons in such publications such as *The Simpsons and Philosophy* by Martin Irwin (2001) and also in *The Gospel According to The Simpsons* by Mark Pinsky (2001) and whilst this is a well trodden path there are still many important and powerful links between RE and the lives and experiences of these famous residents in Springfield. The characters in each episode are used as foils, as devices to represent popular points of view that are instantly recognisable

within the viewer and the audience itself with regards to religious tolerance, refugees and asylum seekers, ethical and moral issues about vegetarianism as well as basic questions about where does our knowledge and experience come from which is linked to epistemology and phenomenology. Moreover, in some of the episodes religions are explicitly explored and Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Judaism have all received comprehensive coverage and have been represented as well as a range of more secular philosophies and ideologies. Also within the episode capsules there are many attempts to address issues linked to the persistence of religious faith in the modern age, to issues about political science like Rousseau's social contract in Bart's Inner Child and in other episodes too numerous to mention in which the vast canvas of human experience is covered comprehensively. This is also reflected in a series of books published by Open Court in the USA with the intention of covering an immense range of films and TV series on more than just a surface level by looking at the philosophical and religious influences contained within them. Inevitably the series will cover The Matrix, The Simpsons, Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter and there are currently fifteen volumes in the series and one of the most curious ones in the series is entitled 'Hip-Hop and philosophy' which covers the existence of God, a philosophy of life as well as a series of meditations upon how society could be organised worthy of a Platonic dialogue or discourse mediated through rap music.

In a book published by Saul Williams the famous freestyle poet entitled *The Dead EMCEE Scrolls* (2006) he uses the Qumran scrolls as a reference point to indicate the discovery of hidden knowledge or gnosis to create a set of hip-hop based poems and raps presented like an ancient religious text. This is significant for all RE teachers because as an ancient symbol of religious truth it has been appropriated and re-used as a cultural signifier for a much more recent example of popular culture hip-hop and rap. In itself many people may object to this appropriation because of the ancient nature of the text and its importance to Christianity; however, this is a fascinating example of how something religious can be used and disseminated on a popular level through street culture. It may not have any immediate classroom relevance (the author does represent in the poem 'Coded Language' a range of different heroes and heroines from across the ages who have brought about social change or revolution including Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, Rumi the Sufi poet and many others and the more courageous of you may want to look at the DJ Krust track 'Coded Language' which brings these words to life as drum and bass music) as such but its very presence serves as an interesting point of contact between contemporary hip-hop culture and religion and its very existence indicates a complex cultural exchange of symbols and signifiers.

In the practical examples that follow popular culture will be used as a reference point or as a place of departure and arrival into a learning experience in the classroom. In many ways it is true to say that many of the references are taken from different religious and spiritual traditions and it can be suggested that the sacred

has returned back into society. The return of the sacred or the re-sacralisation of everyday life (*Grimely et al 2007*) operates on many different levels and no where can this be seen more clearly than in a number of recent films that contain themes linked to religious experience in terms of inspiring awe and wonder, mystical power or through the language and references that are made based upon religious texts and experiences. The sacred seems to have saturated, informed and influenced many different layers of human experience and interaction and it would seem to be desirable and acceptable to use and to harness this cultural capital to present to young people links and connections with their own experiences. In many films like *Amelie*, *Waking Life*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Signs*, *The Matrix*, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, *Men In Black*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Truman Show*, for example, that cross and traverse genres, there is a strong religious and philosophical content. This is of course not coincidental but is intentional and is a sign of how important religion still is today in informing our collective conscience and in creating epics for everyday life. There is clearly a definite sense in which an enhanced viewing of these visual texts is only possible by understanding the wealth of religious symbols, issues or existential questions that are central to these films and this is where the journey must begin to reconnect the learner with the subject.

As the curriculum pendulum shifts and tilts towards the use of a greater degree of creativity in its content and delivery then resources and ideas that promote a greater degree of cohesion between different levels and layers of human experience will become increasingly important. This will ultimately create open and critical thinkers who ask questions and seek their own answers to complex issues. It is not surprising therefore to realise that many of these ‘new’ ideas are simply a reframed creative curriculum from the past with a recovered focus and emphasis as seen previously in the work of writers such as Hammond and Hay and in the work of Michael Grimmet in which the author sought to close the distance between learner and subject by devising a range of creative curriculum ideas linked to an awareness of adolescent thought development.

‘What I am proposing is that as a consequence of young people investigating religious education’s field of enquiry, they should be helped to ‘re-enter’ their personal life-words so that they are enabled to become critically self-conscious and aware of the need to participate consciously in the re-formulation of self...as a unique person in relationship to others’ (Grimmet pg 207 1987)

The writer Ken Robinson in his book *‘Out of our Minds: Learning to be Creative’* envisaged a curriculum based upon creativity, innovation and the need for students to become flexible problem-solvers. This today would seem to represent an interesting departure since the book presents a strong argument for a skills based curriculum that creates critical and creative learners who are able to use key life transfer skills in a variety of different settings:

‘..There is a kind of trance-like-mania in the present direction of educational policy. In place of a reasoned debate about the strategies that are needed to face these extraordinary changes, there is an insistent mantra that we must raise traditional academic standards. These standards were designed for other times and for other purposes. We will not navigate through the complex environment of the future by peering relentlessly into a rear view mirror’ (Robinson 16).

This is, of course, quite radical because Robinson is suggesting that employees in the future will look for people who are creative free thinkers with the ability to problem solve and to take initiatives and these are the very skills that good RE teaching engenders and nurtures within individual learners. The future is unwritten but we should all become willing authors in the composition of a curriculum in which RE is central to the experiences of all learners in terms of promoting life-long learning, empathy, tolerance, curiosity and self-awareness.

The ideas and practical strategies that will inevitably form the major part of this chapter have been designed to inspire, help and to offer suggestions about how to engage young people in a variety of different learning situations. The ideas are by no means definitive or dogmatic but they do represent a unique range of responses to the challenges presented to any RE practitioner to deliver lessons that are inspiring, innovative and memorable using materials taken from popular culture.

The first religion to consider within this proposed framework is Judaism and it does go without saying that Jewish culture is very heavily embedded within our own culture because of the very well-established and well-documented presence of key individuals and personalities who are from this specific cultural background. The performer and writer Sacha Baron Cohen and his brother Erran Baron Cohen are two excellent examples of how well established the Jewish faith is in Britain today. Because of the persona non-gratis Ali G, Sacha Baron Cohen has received wide-spread recognition for his characterisations and this discussion has centred upon his Jewish origins and the specific nature of his humour that would appear to have its roots in the well established tradition of Jewish comedy.

His brother Erran is part of a well respected musical collective called ‘Zohar’ named after the book of splendour a mystical text on the Torah, and he has produced all of the music for his brother’s film Borat and has also produced dance music that brings together a range of middle-eastern influences together. Also within all of this there are many celebrities from Jewish backgrounds and this again is important cultural capital to use and to re-use in the classroom to dissolve any sense of difference between learner and subject. Rachel Weisz the Gucci Model/actress is from Hungarian Jewish roots, David Beckham also has some Jewish ancestry, Daniel Radcliffe, Orlando Bloom, Amy Winehouse, Natalie Portman, Winona Ryder, David Blaine and confusingly the dancehall artist Sean Paul have Jewish ancestry. All of this gives a human face to a religion that maybe quite distant and

alien from the life experiences of most young people and this is an important way of challenging their own preconceptions and notions of distance from their own life experiences and belief systems. Also I have chosen a range of people from a Jewish cultural background with whom many young people will be familiar and there are also many others who could be identified and selected. In addition to this there is of course a difference between a person who is a 'cultural' Jew and a person who is a practicing Jew and the first may have decided not to practice their religion but may well define themselves as coming from a Jewish background whilst the second person will keep the tenets of their faith and will take part in many of the religious aspects of this experience of belonging. This in the end shows how complex definitions can be and how it is important to approach this complicated issue as sensitively as possible.

There are of course many aspects of Jewish culture embedded in our own culture and in passing it maybe useful to reference particular films that are indebted in part to a complex process of philosophical exchange and to the sharing of cultural capital. The Hollywood blockbuster 'Men In Black' (directed by Barry Sonnenfeld, written by Ed Solomon Distributed by Columbia Pictures 1997) is according to Arthur Taussig a very complex film with a much deeper meaning and importance than a superficial viewing would suggest. The film stars Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones as two agents who work ceaselessly and tirelessly to protect the World from aliens from other galaxies. The 1950s feel to the film reflects its comic book origins as well as the sense of fear and uncertainty that pervaded the United States at this time due to the threat of communism. The film however has much more ancient and much deeper origins since it is based upon an old Jewish folktale taken from the *Midrash Aggadah* a Jewish text on legends that contains the actions and the deeds of the 36 righteous men.

'In a word, the 1997 Hollywood film Men in Black is the unmodified, though modernised, retelling of an ancient Jewish legend called the '36 Righteous Men' (Arthur Taussig).

It is the job of the 'righteous men' or Zaddik (also transliterated as Tzadik or Tsadik) who exist in all generations to repair the damage done to the world called 'Tikkum Olam'-the healing of the world-and they go unnoticed in the world with their hidden power largely because of their humble nature and commonplace vocations. The story of the holy men fighting evil spirits updated as a popular and light hearted science fiction film is an interesting piece of media to use in the teaching of the cultural contribution of Judaism to society today. This can be used both in terms of the cultural inheritance that has been created to show how the Jewish faith is still with us and is still part of the popular culture that we inhabit. This is also further reinforced by a reading of the legends of the *Baal Shem Tov* by Martin Buber and also any of the triad of books written by Howard Schwartz and his series of lively translations of Jewish myths published by Oxford university

press.

It would be an interesting activity to compare some of these supernatural stories with the MIB film and to suggest how the themes are very ancient and how many of these motifs re-occur time and time again in well know Hollywood films but this would be a complete study in itself. The screenwriter Solomon cleverly put the story into a vaguely 1950s background to be true to the original feel of the stories in a climate of fear about the other at a time in American history when fear was used as a mental prison to control and to condition the populace. This could of course be read on many different levels in terms of McCarthyism and its insistence on challenging the enemy within our very midst, which at that time was communism and was expressed through a very real fear of alien attack or at worse infiltration. In practical terms the film does work well in the classroom since all students will be familiar with the film and it is a classic case of taking an embedded piece of popular culture and re-reading it in another context and with an added layer of meaning. It is therefore a powerful resource in your classroom armoury. This is of course an extremely effective way of engaging young people and creating a sense that there is something of real value to be gained from reading different levels of meaning into a piece of popular culture that all young people would seem to enjoy and to value.

In many ways music acts as a universal language that enables many young people to articulate and to express their thoughts and feelings in a familiar and secure arena of self expression. It is music that the next few pages of this chapter are devoted and more specifically there will be a full investigation into the potential of music as a bridging point between different worlds and modes of expression to enable young people to manage the transition between their own thoughts and feelings and the experiences of a believer from a specific faith background which in this case is Judaism.

In the context of Judaism there are many possibilities presented to the classroom practioner to use music in the classroom as an integral part of the learning experience itself. It is clear that for many young people musical self-expression is a core experience that goes right to the centre of their being and given the lack of opportunities that many of them have to express themselves in any other way than through time-tabled music lessons, this gives an invaluable opportunity for all young people to investigate a real life issue through lyric writing and musical composition.

‘Music...is the spiritual language of emotion, which is hidden more secretly than the soul....just as the clavier keys must be touched before they sound; it is only then that the emotion communicates with the slumbering realm of tones’ (Bunt 3)

This activity was inspired by a track composed by an artist called Matthew Cooper working with the dance collective ‘Outside’ entitled ‘To Forgive but not to Forget’/’Lim’ chol V’lo Lishkoach’ which contains a sample of a young Jewish violin

player looped over computerised drum beats to create an eerily evocative piece of modern dance music that somehow managed to capture the emotions associated with this tragic episode in human history. The track was originally intended as a piece to be played to accompany the Holocaust Memorial Day. From this track and from another that sampled a Jewish cantor in a Synagogue entitled 'The Moon After The Fall' also by Matthew Cooper, it became increasingly apparent that this music could be used to provoke and to evoke emotions, thoughts and feelings that could be used to encourage and to support students to respond on a personal level to the issues raised by the Holocaust. Based upon these resources plus additional musical backup from a track entitled 'Crimea' by Oi Vai Voi it was possible to work with the students in the creation of lyrical and poetic pieces that sought to capture their reactions to the treatment of the Jews during this difficult time in their history. This involved in practical terms the use of a CD player in the classroom with donated copies of the track which were played as a starter during which students were asked to write down their thoughts, feelings and responses to the track and then to feed these back to the class as a discussion point. These responses were then used to create a series of individual responses to the issues raised by the experiences associated with emotions linked to loss, injustice and despair and yet with a message and a promise of hope, renewal and of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity.

As a result of this it was further possible to present a series of descriptive adjectives on a handout with a single stark image that could then be used as a writing frame to enable the students to frame their responses to issues raised by prejudice and discrimination. This worked even better when the lyrics were then linked to musical reference points and students started to think about how they could use the power and immediacy of musical self expression to convey the points they wanted to by showing what they had learnt about the conditions in which the Holocaust took place. From this activity the students will learn how to frame their responses through lyrics and poems to a specific point in time that for many is of course very distant and by definition remote. However, it would seem that we are condemned to repeat history and this is very true when you consider the events in the world today since the events associated with the Holocaust and in a way the outcomes created by the students were in fact part of the open work in the sense that history is still being written today at this moment.

The objectives of the lesson were basically to respond on a personal level to the issues raised by the Holocaust and from this point of departure all of these activities could be used to facilitate the student's learning. The lesson is really an experiential one and there is no real teacher input as such since the students are encouraged to respond on a personal level to these difficult and complex issues. This chapter will close with a final epilogue to this specific lesson and will demonstrate how to involve students in a unique and memorable experience that actually translates their individual learning from the classroom and into a music recording studio thereby

completing the whole learning cycle as a tangible practical outcome.

The next example of the use of popular culture in a learning context will look at Christianity and how to enliven and to engage even the most reluctant learner in a series of activities that will move on their knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes in an unexpected way. The resource for this learning experience will be a piece of music by the hip-hop artist Kanye West called 'Jesus Walks' which in a round about way would appear to develop and to extend Luke 4:18-24 as a piece of contemporary urban music that links in with liberation theology from South America. This piece manages to communicate an unexpected message of social reform by affirming a sense of solidarity with and affinity for all of the downtrodden, oppressed and rejected people in the world today.

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor
he has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovery to the sight to the blind;
to set free the oppressed
and announce that their time has come
when the Lord will save his people'
(Luke 4:18-24 quoted in K. O'Donnell pg 95)

The track by Kanye West may in itself present a number of challenges to young people and to adults alike since on first reading the lyrics may appear to have little or no relevance to the study of religion in the contemporary classroom however this is to miss the point. The opening part of the song announces that 'We are at war with terrorism, racism, and most of all we are at war with ourselves' and in a way this is the announcement that the greatest war is within the human heart to do good over evil and this is an interesting starting point for the whole track. By doing good this can mean the duty to help those people around us and to intervene to assist those people who are struggling or endeavouring to lift themselves out of difficult circumstances to find a better future and a better tomorrow. Kanye outlines and delineates a range of activities that would fall way outside of the confines of religious or spiritual conventions in terms of speaking about the marginalised , the rejected, the outcast and yet in this there is a very strong message of redemption and hope in the dynamics of social change that can be brought about by religious belief and personal conviction. This of course mirrors the message from the Gospels and is not in any way at variance or at conflict with anything that Jesus spoke about during his brief ministry in Palestine in the 1st Century AD. In a way what is more surprising is that we have a contemporary rapper talking about these issues today and the motivation because the lyrics are quite interesting when you consider the fact that Kanye West is a Christian and he has openly spoken about his faith and beliefs on numerous occasions. The significance of this piece is that it is the clearest expression of his faith and belief in the redeeming power of forgiveness in a society seemingly

besieged by materialism and narrow and very literal interpretations of the Gospels that add very little in terms of exploring meaning and relevance to our lives today.

The video to the song is also quite startling since it has a black Jesus figure moving through the streets and houses of an American city meeting with ordinary people and ministering to them in a number of different ways and there are about 2 versions of the video united by the fact that they show people who fall outside of the care of the church ([HYPERLINK "http://www.mvwire.com/dynamic/article_view.asp?AID=10856"](http://www.mvwire.com/dynamic/article_view.asp?AID=10856) www.mvwire.com/dynamic/article_view.asp?AID=10856 for an exploration of director Chris Milk's thoughts about the filming of the video and the imagery contained therein). This is because of the lifestyles that they lead and the activities that they take part in this would seem to render them beyond help, charity or even forgiveness and yet Jesus forgives them all and offers to them the hope of salvation and love. This is an extremely powerful and strong message that is quite difficult to convey to young people however through the music and the video it would be possible to touch upon this message and to get the young people to ask why they think that Kanye West, at the height of his commercial success, has actually released this track that speaks about his faith and his religious convictions. This could be seen to be an unusual step for such a person consumed by the material world and the need for success and recognition.

In a similar way, the rapper Nas has also released a track called 'Hate Me Now' which contains images associated with the crucifixion when the rapper himself controversially imitates Christ by experiencing the crucifixion himself whilst rapping about how people 'hate what they fear: destroy what they cannot conquer'. This creates a poignant and moving reinterpretation of the passion of Christ but a much more controversial one at that but it is also significant that Nas has chosen to use images associated with the passion of Christ in a modern urban context. This shows how the legacy of Christ still has cultural capital to draw upon when you consider the fact that his life, death and eventual resurrection still have the power to inspire and to influence artists from a whole new generation who seek to frame their responses to issues and to life itself along the lines of his passion and sacrifice. Also it is significant that Nas also talks about the cross as a symbolic burden that we all carry within us and that this is the symbolism of sacrifice and struggle that Christ embodied in his life, death and resurrection. In recent years Nas has also released an album entitled 'God's Son' with the image of himself on the front cover holding a white dove as a symbol of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity, of the holy spirit and also as a symbol of purity and of inspiration that is indebted to higher powers than mere human art. This is again deeply significant and even more so given the huge influence that Nas has exerted upon artists from the hip-hop world and beyond as a rapper who has used a lot of religious symbolism in his lyrics, poems and words. Nas has also had an important influence upon the orthodox Jewish rapper Matisyahu through the album 'It was written' who was inspired to use his faith as a way of informing his music through the medium of hip-hop.

The best copy of the 'Jesus Walks' CD single would be the version remixed by Mase (product code 9863962) since this is free of all expletives and does still remain true to the original essence of the track itself with slightly different lyrics with a stronger focus upon seeking forgiveness and overcoming the lure and temptation of material objects. This is further personified by a world in which 'if you talk about religion then no radio station will play you' and this is an interesting comment upon the state of the world we live in today as religion has apparently retreated from our lives as a source of guidance to be replaced by a new system or morality based upon materialism and the acquisition of status symbols of conspicuous consumption.

In returning back to the original message of Christ it would be particularly poignant to look at the cultural context within which he emerged and how he spent time with people who were seen at the time to be beyond the pale, tax collectors as a symbol of oppression and outcasts such as lepers, prostitutes although the Aramaic and the Hebrew terms used to refer to Mary Magdalene are ambiguous, but the idea is clear and at the time there must have been a degree of shock associated with this association. However, as part of the Messianic Secret and the Messianic banquet idea it was clear that all people no matter who they were would ultimately be welcomed into the kingdom of God regardless of their status, their social standing or even their position in an unjust society. All of this can be seen to be mirrored in the lyrics for 'Jesus Walks' and this is further exemplified in a quote attributed to Subcommandant Marcos in Mexico, who is a famous writer, poet and activist who has brought together a huge popular movement in his own country comprising of landless peasants who are struggling to bring about greater equality and justice in their own country. Marcos himself has not spoken about his religious beliefs but to many of his followers he embodies a lot of the ideas represented by revolutionary leaders of the past who have sought to elevate and to exalt the downtrodden and to find a better future for the people around them and as such this is the link with Christ that I am making. For himself, and for his followers, his face is a mirror reflecting the struggles of all people to be treated equally and justly:

'We are you, Marcos is black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidoro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Christobal, a Jew in Germany, a Gypsy in Poland, a Mohawk in Quebec, a pacifist in Bosnia, a single woman in the metro at 10pm, a peasant without land, a gang member in the slums, an unemployed worker, an unhappy student and of course, a Zapista in the mountains' (N Klein 2001)

This provides a powerful link to a range of different Christian ideas about justice and the need to struggle on behalf of those people who do not have the voice to express their own experiences and needs. To start off any form of lesson on these issues can be problematic and difficult however given the words of Kanye West's 'Jesus Walks' combined with images of Christ from a South American tradition,

walking with the poor and the downtrodden, together with images of poverty and injustice, it is possible to create a number of opportunities for young people to engage with the subject matter that you are intending to cover by contextualising what they do know and then moving on towards what they do not know. The ideas contained within the South American Liberation Theology movement are fascinating and there is no shortage of images of Christ dressed in revolutionary clothes, indigenous clothes and dress walking with the poor and the downtrodden and this can serve as an invaluable opportunity to present more unusual images of Christ walking with these people affirming his solidarity with their condition and position in an unjust society. Also the life and career of subcommandant Marcos as a non-self identity in Mexico also provides another way of contextualising these ideas further since a lot of these ideas are unfolding right now in the present and this will give the ideas further weight and gravity.

In a way, Marcos is not a liberation theologian and yet many of the ideas that he embodies and encapsulates are true to these principles because of the fact that he is all about finding an affinity with the poor and the oppressed. This elevates him to another level of action in a similar way to how priests, like Oscar Romero endeavoured to challenge the unequal distribution of wealth in El Salvador with the predictable consequences involving sacrifice and death which are chapters yet to be written in the case of Marcos. The focus upon this lesson would be to understand Christian responses to the idea of justice and injustice. In addition to the ideas outlined above, there would also be a Power-Point to accompany the activities that would use images of Kanye West, Martin Luther King and also of Oscar Romero to make the link clear between any person who stands up in the name of injustice and moreover as Martin Luther King famously said 'injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere' and this could also serve as an introductory quote to make the students think and to relate back their own ideas to the ones under investigation.

The final example of using popular culture to amplify and exemplify aspects of a particular religion or faith will endeavour to approach the study of Buddhism from an unusual point of view. The study of Buddhism can present another set of intriguing challenges and will inevitably prove to be a popular area of study for most young people. This is because when approaching Buddhism there is a sense in which there is no requirement to believe in either a personal or impersonal God or deity or even a set of deities; most young people seem to respond well to this challenge. Also the Buddha's diagnosis of the human condition is usually received well in terms of overcoming the illusions that limit us so that we can become truly free of this self-imposed exile from self. Buddhism is also about increasing individual self-awareness and that this resonates with young people are in terms of becoming increasingly more self aware and conscious of their own selves.

There are of course many opportunities to draw upon a range of resources taken

from different popular culture resources that are either film, music or ICT based. In recent years films like the Truman Show have embodied a range of Buddhist ideas that link back to the idea of Maya and the notion that we are living lives that are based upon illusion and we are oblivious to this fact as we carry on with our everyday activities in the belief that the experiences we are having are real. However, in the case of the 'The Truman Show' the main character played by Jim Carey, Truman Burbank, is an actor in an elaborate reality television show, with his own life as the subject. He has been filmed since his birth without his consent, or even worse without his own awareness of this situation. He is an unwilling and unconscious participant in a reality television show called his life and he is an exile from the truth of his own existence. This means that every person he has loved and every experience he has had has been counterfeit and unreal and he is eventually led from the unreal to the real. His journey begins and ends at this point. In many ways 'The Truman Show' represents the condition that we all find ourselves in; separated from the truth of our lives in a reality that is an illusion and we have to find our own salvation and realisation by cutting through the illusions that we create, and are created by others around us, 'Ultimately, the only illusions we have to escape are the ones we create ourselves' (Truman in the Truman Show).

In the 'Matrix' as well there is also an identical state of affairs in which Neo, the hero of the film, is under the impression that his life is unreal and that everything he has ever experienced would appear to be counterfeit and then one day he has these suspicions confirmed. He is in Buddhist terms on the point of self-realisation. From this point he embarks upon a painful journey of self-discovery by which he realises that everything he had believed to be real is in fact unreal and he has to extricate himself from the illusions that have captured him and limited his own awareness of his true self. This mirrors exactly the story of the Prince Siddhartha who spent 30 years living in utter and complete isolation from the realities of human existence. One day he ventures beyond the confines of his father's palace and for the first time he sees old age, poverty, disease and death and he is awoken from the deep sleep that is his life and realises that all people are him and that he is all people and he decides to find answers to why we suffer as human beings. This is the start of his internal and his external journey and the two become one and he seeks the answers to these central questions about human suffering and the nature of human existence.

This journey could also be represented musically since there are artists today who are influenced by Buddhist ideas about life and groups such as the Beastie Boys who have released a track entitled 'Bodhisatva Vow' on the album 'Ill Communication' which is all about the Buddha's vow to bring about change to the human condition and groups such as Faithless on a track called 'Reverence' which discusses human suffering and how this raises fundamental questions about the meaning of our own lives and of the lives of other people around us. In addition, a number of other musical pieces can be used to convey a Buddhist approach to life and to suffering.

More specifically, other tracks outline the mental poisons that are central to turning the Wheel of Life, or Samsara, which binds us all about its spokes by the actions and the reactions that we do and accumulate on a daily basis. The artist Ms Dynamite, although not a Buddhist, has talked about anger, hatred and jealousy which are central to the human condition, within her track entitled, 'They Don't Know' which although a little dated, still contains some interesting lyrics and words that can be used as a starter to engage most young people and to make them think about how they can be attached to negative feelings and how these attachments can bring about negative consequences. More recently a piece of music by Roll Deep a grime music artist, entitled 'Bad Man' talks about a 'circle of pain that never goes away' and this could be used as a reference point for karma, and for the endless cycle of action and reaction that binds and limits us all at times. On a more accessible level, a track by Justin Timberlake entitled, 'What Goes Around' also contains references to the idea of Karma and how one thing we do can come back to us and visit us. The Alicia Keyes' song 'Karma' again mentions a similar state of affairs but in the context of love and relationships which of course would be a source of attachment, action and reaction. The point here is that there are a vast range of resources available out there for teaching Buddhism and building in musical interludes into your lessons which will be something that young people do enjoy, appreciate and recognise to be both intrinsically and extrinsically valuable and accessible to them.

In a way, Buddhism can be a difficult belief system to teach because it questions the foundations of many of the things that contemporary consumer culture is based upon. This can be challenging since many young people may be committed to achieving these goals. Buddhism teaches that attachment to many of these material gains can create pain, suffering and sorrow and this can be a difficult set of lessons and points to convey in a classroom without creating intense debate and controversy and it is usually a good idea to focus upon the pain and the suffering that attachment to material objects can bring rather than upon the objects themselves. Another positive and constructive way into the subject itself would be to use the film 'The Little Buddha' which contains an excellent and colourful sequence of Prince Siddhartha's renunciation of his kingdom and his subsequent journey towards Nirvana. This will provide the classical portrayal of the Buddha's life story that can be compared and contrasted with the more contemporary approaches to the same issues. This can work very well with the students and will open up debates about our knowledge and experience and our attachment to material objects in the world today.

In exemplifying and amplifying a specific aspect of a religion to teach to young people using popular culture, it is important to stress that the rich synergy that can be extracted from these resources rests heavily and obviously upon teacher interpretation. It goes without saying that interpretations are an invaluable weapon in your teaching armoury because it is by presenting well-thought out, resourced and planned lessons that use contemporary materials in an unusual and unexpected

way to support the learning in the classroom by creating meaningful and profound learning experiences. The Simpsons, as stated elsewhere, contains a number of references to other examples of contemporary culture that are frequently drawn upon by the very existence of a specific plot-line, sub-plot or quick fire allusion and this enables the viewer or reader to participate in the experience of authorship itself because they are aware of the allusion already. The Simpsons episodes are actually based upon the idea of an intelligent audience who can extract meanings from the 'text' they are viewing and this is an important idea to hold onto as an educationalist. This process of intertextuality is of course implicitly linked to the whole experience of postmodernity since it presupposes that the viewer has a broad repertoire of cultural experiences to draw upon in understanding the episodes themselves. This is seen in the way by which an audience can create their own meanings for a specific episode largely made up of young people and this will in turn create the idea of a self-aware piece of popular culture that makes connections, links and allusions to a range of cultural signifiers as a complex social process. As an RE teacher if it possible to inhabit this rich world of convergence and connectivity then it will be possible to create learning experiences that will be exciting, engaging and life changing and this is the ultimate power of popular culture when used in a classroom based learning experience and more importantly when used to teach RE.

There is one particular episode of The Simpsons that deserves special mention since it cleverly contains some of the most central and fundamental aspects of Buddhist dharma or teachings hidden ingeniously within the episode capsule itself. The episode in question is 'The Dead Putting Society' (Season 2 episode 19 product code 7FO8) which is an obvious allusion to the Robin Williams' film The Dead Poet's Society and this again is a clever play upon words and meanings by using an allusion to a film that embodies and represents the idea of innovative education that goes too far in conveying meanings to young people and is seen to be a cautionary tale about this type of experience. The episode has many subplots and minor vignettes that are characteristically added to distract, entertain and to amuse the viewer. However the main part of the episode is very useful and provides a very clear and astute representation of the 'Four Noble Truths' and the 'Eight Fold Path' that are both central to Buddhist Dharma or teachings. The episode is based upon the inability of Homer Simpson to get on with his next door neighbour Ned Flanders and is also about how both parents use their respective sons to get back at each other to make one parent feel inferior to the other. The two fathers challenge their sons to a game of crazy golf and the two sons are forced to compete against each other in an attempt to resolve the fundamental question of who is the better parent or who is the better family. The episode unfolds as Bart and Todd both undergo an intensive training programme to improve their game so that on the day they can be victorious and triumphant. However, based upon a superficial reading, the episode would appear to have no connection with Buddhism and yet it is within Lisa Simpsons' attempts to resolve the conflict that the teachings of the Buddha are brought to fruition and are realised quite powerfully. In 20 minutes a popular

cartoon offers to a receptive audience the opportunity to use Buddhist teachings to overcome conflict and negativity and to extricate an individual from the endless cycle of human suffering caused by attachment to negative emotions.

The learning objective for such a lesson would be to reflect upon the significance of the 'Four Noble Truths' and the 'Eight Fold Path' in Buddhism and this would be based upon an exploration of the relationship between the truths and how they relate to the 'Eight Fold Path' itself. The lesson would also involve the drawing of a Mandala as well with a central point or lotus around which four inner circles would be drawn and then on the outer part of the circle there would be 8 segments to represent the 'Eight Fold Path'. A mandala is a meditation device that is used to reflect upon the unity amidst the many and these drawings tend to be incredibly elaborate and colourful and are used to help a seeker after the truth to obtain a profound sense of self-realisation by contemplating the symmetry of the circles as Nirvana is symbolized by the central point in the circle and the four noble truths are remembered and then ultimately the 8 fold path is remembered as a way of achieving freedom from the world of sense pleasure. The lesson would unfold a little like this;

Task1; Core Unit;

Pupils to watch "Dead Putting Society" and to take notes within the following areas;
What causes the Conflict in the Episode? (Suffering Exists)
What are the roles played by Ned and Homer?(Suffering comes from attachment to desire/outcome)
What are the roles played by Todd and Bart? (Bart and Todd both give up the game and draw, Suffering ends when attachment ends, i.e. Freedom from outcome)
What is the role played by Lisa in Bart's training? (Eightfold Path)

Pupils to reflect upon the notes they have taken and to discuss the issues raised. Pupils to think about the roles of each character in The Simpsons;

Task2; Core Unit;

Pupils to reflect upon the following;

The Buddha diagnosed the Human condition in the following way;

Suffering exists; What are the sources of suffering in our lives at the moment?, hatred, dislike, conflict; Like Ned and Homer who generate hatred, dislike and conflict and we cannot escape this reality and this the human condition based upon attachments to negativity.

Suffering comes from Attachment; We all suffer because we have pride, ego and love of ourselves, if someone verbally abuses us we suffer, we feel pain, but does pain exist if there is no one there to feel it? Pain does not have an absolute reality, it is dependent on us experiencing it. Homer is attached to notion of feeling better than Ned and this brings suffering and pain, because he wants an outcome which humiliates his neighbour at all

costs.

Suffering Ends when Attachments End; It is only when we give up things which appear to matter, that we become free, it is only when Todd and Bart draw and agree to give up the competition that they become free of the whole process set in to motion by their Father's quarrel. It is only when we give up any form of attachment to the fruits of our actions in terms of expectation, reward or the conditional nature of what we do are we truly free from all of these variables and changes.

Freedom from Suffering is possible by following The Eightfold Path; How do we escape from the realities of suffering to become truly free in our own limitations in the lives that we lead? Lisa trains Bart and teaches him many of the different components of the Buddhist Path;

Right Understanding; Lisa teaches Bart through skill and technique how to understand the whole psychology behind the whole game but also how to understand the teachings that she is about to give to him.

Right Awareness; Lisa teaches Bart how to be conscious/aware of what he is doing with the golf club; Knowledge overcomes Conflict and the Ignorance of Homer and frees Bart from anger, hatred and jealousy which are the three mental poisons that create an endless sequence of causation.

Right Speech; Bart talks to Todd to bring an end to the conflict which has arisen and both of the boys realise that they need to destroy these negative emotions within themselves and to let go of the enmity that has been created in their own hearts.

Right Action; Lisa teaches Bart not to accept Homer's advice and to do things which do not prolong the conflict and he becomes focused and unattached to the outcome of the match itself and gives up the fruits of his labour as the doer.

Right Livelihood/Work; Lisa teaches Bart not to do things which will prevent the promotion of Buddhist teachings, more related to work and not doing something which goes against Buddha's teaching or Dharma by giving up his father's anger that is not his but which has blinded him to the true nature of the situation and has created a veil of illusion between himself and the truth of the situation.

Right Effort; Lisa teaches Bart how to use minimum effort to improve his game, Bart overcomes the aggression promoted by Homer against The Flanders by doing the right thing by ultimately giving up all traces of hatred within his heart and by deciding to work with Todd to bring an end to the conflict itself.

Right Thought; Bart overcomes Homer's hatred of Ned by seeing Todd as an ally in the conflict and by this action they both overcome the enmity of their fathers and become truly free of this negativity.

Right Concentration; Lisa teaches Bart to concentrate his mind through Zen Buddhist sayings or Koans and these are usually a series of paradoxes that are designed to help the seeker after truth gain enlightenment or self-realisation and the Koans help Bart withdraw his thoughts from everything except the game; "One hand clapping", A tree falling in a forest, does it make a sound if there is no one to hear it"? The one hand clapping is an impossibility and really the answer here is silence since this is the state of mind that a true seeker after the truth needs and the tree falling in the woods is all about emptying the mind of all rational thought because it is an impossible question to answer because for sound to exist a person will need to be there to hear it and yet it must make a sound but sound can only exist if there is a person present to hear it! These are both used as techniques to clear the rational thought processes of a seeker after truth and to prepare the mind for achieving Nirvana, the 'urn of nectar'/the extinction of the ego or the self so that a person becomes formless and free of all human limitations, like a river flowing into an ocean, like an empty clay pot smashing to let the air flow into the atmosphere leaving no distinction between the

air within and the air without.

Task3; Extension Unit;

Pupils to put what they have learnt into Mandala pattern, which they draw into their books;

Four small Inner Circles=Four Noble Truths

Eight outer Circles= Eightfold Path

Centre of Mandala= Nirvana, or Enlightenment.

Plenary; Q/As What have we learnt today?

The Teachings of Buddhism were drawn directly from the inner experiences of the Buddha who out of compassion for the whole of humanity diagnosed the human condition and offered to everyone a way of overcoming their own suffering and unhappiness through The Four Noble Truths and the Eight Fold Path.

The ironic ending of the episode is based upon the fact that even after Bart and Todd give up any sense of attachment to their fruit of their actions their respective parents still refuse to surrender their own misled insistence upon humiliating each other. In many ways this shows an aspect of human nature that is quite common and a reoccurring motif in a lot of Buddhist texts how we continue to be attached to our own negative emotions despite the fact these attachments bring suffering, pain and countless rebirths bound to the wheel of life, death and rebirth. The end of the episode meditates upon the fact that it is the younger members of the families who are receptive to Buddhist teachings or to the dharma for it is they who give up anger, hatred and jealousy by living out the teachings of the Buddha by surrendering all pettiness to emotions that confine and limit us by turning the wheel of Samsara and binding to an endless cycle of causation, action and reaction.

*‘One who conquers himself is greater than another who conquers a thousand times a thousand men on the battlefield. Be victorious over yourself and not over others’
(E. Easwaran102)*

The lesson will end with a plenary that will endeavour to bring together and to pull together all of the elements of what the students should have learnt in terms of understanding how the four noble truths relate to the eight fold path and how by practicing these ideas the dharma of the Buddha is fulfilled and completed. Also the lesson will use an episode of The Simpsons to make the students think differently about something that they are all familiar with and this will imitate and rehearse the whole rationale for using popular culture in the classroom. By using The Simpsons’ episode most students will engage with the lesson content and will by definition take more away with them in terms of knowledge and understanding. They may well start to read aspects of popular culture in different ways and will start to understand the rich levels of meaning that exist in their own lives or will be able to

relate this back to an aspect of a particular religious truth and the learning cycle will start with no beginning or end.

The ideas contained with this chapter are of course steeped in the conviction that there is a lot of cultural capital to be found within popular culture which inhabits and influences our lives today. In a way the connectivity that is represented by many of these aspects of popular culture is one of the greatest resources in your teaching repertoire since RE, to be meaningful and in touch, must take into account and consideration the influences upon young people and must engage each young learner in such a way as to become meaningful, relevant and profound. It can be a difficult remit to fulfill because of the negative attitudes that are all pervasive in some schools with regards to the status that RE has or does not have and many young people are incredibly switched off by a subject that appears to be remote and apparently out of touch with their concerns about life today. It would therefore seem necessary to suggest that the young people we teach do deserve the richest possible range of learning experiences that we can provide, that are both life changing and life affirming by creating a genuine sense of curiosity and inquisitiveness. In this way RE is perfectly placed within the curriculum to meet this need and with a lot of the government's underscoring of the need to promote cultural, social and community coherence it would appear that the role for the subject has just become a lot more important and by definition will become even more radically re-defined as a result. This is of course encouraging and there may well be a collective renaissance in RE thinking as the subject's importance is seen to be much more important than ever before in a world that can be at times characterised by a degree of uncertainty or anomie about basic human values, norms and expectations.

In many ways it is quite an interesting point to think about when you consider the amount of ink that is expended upon the purposes of RE and how we are asked to almost apologise for the value of our respective subject given the low status that it still has to endure within many areas of school life. This is of course a real concern and is evenly matched by more concrete concerns like budget and the practical constraints and parameters that we all have to operate within, on a daily basis. The bottom line is that we need to ensure that RE has the high status that it deserves by creating a pedagogy that is in touch and relevant to the needs of the young people that we work with and that this will only be achieved through perseverance and through insistence on the highest possible standards for the subject itself in terms of offering a variety of learning experiences that are both transformative and liberating for all concerned. Therefore, by returning back to opening sections of this chapter, it is clear that our pedagogy should become critical by offering to young people the ability and the power to extricate themselves from the mind-forged manacles of the past and to create a whole new generation of aware and independent thinkers who are willing to delve beneath surfaces and exteriors to find deeper meanings and truths. However these truths and meanings have yet to be written since in a way this is all about the open work of which we are all the authors

writing paragraphs, pages and chapters in a future yet to be written. It is only when we have shed some of the limiting and unhelpful models of pedagogy will we be able to make the progress that is so urgently needed today:

‘The educator for liberator has to *die* as the unilateral educator of the educatees, in order to be born again as the educator-educatee of the educate-educators. An educator is a person who has to live in the deep significance of Easter’ (P.Taylor 1993)

Epilogue; (can be linked to a track and to lyrics if deemed necessary or desirable)

In addition to the material presented in the proceeding chapter it would seem appropriate to add to this section about Judaism and popular culture a final outcome and thought linked to the Holocaust lesson. Many of the young people involved in the lesson and the experiences associated with the process of composing a piece of music in response to these issues wished to create an actual piece of music that represented their own unique responses to the issues raised. It was therefore agreed that about 9 of the Year 9 students who had taken part in the process as Year 8 students should record a piece of music that should reflect their thoughts and feelings. It took quite along time to put all of this together and after a year of searching for the right producer a person was found who was willing to work with the young people concerned. The producer was called Anton Flandens and he had worked with quite famous artists such as a rapper called Sway and Baby Blue so it was clear that he could deliver and could produce quality music. The whole procedure took about a day and the students recorded their voices and rapped their

lyrics and the track was mastered and was produced with a kind of Palestinian and Israeli sound over a hip-hop beat. The track was entitled 'Ashes and Tears'. This was the culmination of work that had started on the 8th January 2007 and had taken up until the 25th January 2008 to complete. The outcome was fantastic and the seeds for this whole experience had actually been sown in a RE lesson confined by four walls and yet not confined at all! In a way this experience showed how powerful an experience like this could be in motivating and encouraging young people to engage with a subject that was quite profound and for almost all of them completely outside of their repertoire of life experiences. The students exhibited high level thinking skills such as empathy and they also worked as a group towards a shared set of ideas and eventually the music was distributed onto almost everyone's mobile phone. The lyrics were also conscious and aware and actually did make a difference to many people. This is of course not exactly a unique or one-off experience but it was a difficult process to oversee from beginning to end because of the fact that there were so many variables to control and to manipulate but in the end the outcomes spoke for themselves and each of the young people involved actually now has a copy of the CD and a feeling and a sense that they were part of something really special and unique that was worthwhile and relevant to their own lives today.

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