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Evaluating the impact of using film to engage with issues of social justice with a year 9 class

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Abstract

Social justice education is uniquely placed, and taught, within religious education. Within this context there is very limited research on the methods of teaching social injustice. This small-scale study aims to consider a unique perspective of teaching and learning within social justice, with a focus on vicarious learning, namely through film. We already contend that the authentic experience of religious people is most valuable when learning about religion in RE. Hence, I want to consider the link between the injustices faced by those in the LGBTQIA+ community and those who face racial discrimination, with Hollywood films as the main facilitator, with the hope that students can identify and work with themes of injustice.

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Social justice has been cemented in education for some time now, with Michael Grimmitt (2010) reflecting on how policy and education systems should adapt to include education into injustices. Recent injustices, such as the war between Russia and Ukraine, and Israel-Palestine conflict, have been concerns for students across both of my placements, as have school-based injustices, such as use of or lack of gender-neutral toilets. Grimmitt (2010) highlights the importance of social justice education in that we desire a society that provides equal opportunities and access, with no disadvantage or discrimination because of race, gender, or any other factors. Since Grimmitt (2010) made these remarks, the landscape of justice across our society is much unchanged – injustices still exist. Patricia Hannam and Chris May (2022) tie social justice education to religious education and suggest it must transform how young people 'speak and act in the world' (Hannam & May, 2022, p.254).

The potential for positive change in the world justifies including social justice education, given we want a society that doesn't have unjust institutions or individuals that perpetuate injustices. Religious education is uniquely positioned when it comes to social justice considering the subject concerns the good and morality, and more generally how society can be cohesive (Grimmitt, 2010). Grimmitt (2010) suggests religious education creates a good environment to discuss these issues. Therefore, from my personal experience, and recognising the unique position religious education has with social justice education I have decided to design this piece of research that unites film and social injustice with religious education. I want to justify the use of videos as a useful means of vicarious learning. The justification is due to the immense pressure on RE as a subject, given that in a lot of schools, it is not given adequate curriculum time and teachers are under more time pressure to deliver often sensitive and important topics (Ofsted, 2021). Given the lack of curriculum time, if film is a successful way to educate a group of white students about the struggles of racism through vicarious learning, for example, then it should be an encouraged form of teaching. In my experience, engaging with these injustices through cinema can open new interpretations and dialogue. Therefore, in this study, I will attempt to justify the use of film in teaching about social injustice and hope to find that film is a positive enabling factor for students in terms of teaching and learning.

This project will begin by outlining and evaluating the current findings in social justice education with a split between three themes: social justice in the classroom; film and its pedagogical implications; and the current state of social justice education (specifically, racism and LGTBQIA+ education). Unfortunately, literature on LGBTQIA+/identity discrimination lacks significantly, and I will later identify the potential reasons why and outline them as a good reason for my study. Based on the literature review, I intend to design a series of lessons that aim to educate students about two specific social injustices: racism and identity discrimination of the LGBTQIA+ community. The dominant stimuli of these lessons will be film-based, and I will find appropriate films that draw out relevant themes around these injustices and provide students with the best chance at identifying these themes. If their experience determines that film is a useful means of delivering this kind of education then it will aid my professional development in the sense that I have a passion for social justice education, and going forward I can integrate this into my lessons.

As a final foreword, I will begin by defining social justice and make it explicit from other kinds of structural injustices, such as distributive (in)justice (Boyles et al., 2008). Boyles describes distributive injustice as an unequal distribution of some kind of resource of 'material' between the people concerned. This may be linked to redistribution of resources in modern society, to rectify colonial damages or make the world an equal playing field, for example. Whilst this is a justice we should aim to educate for, social injustice is different. It concerns an agender to address the power imbalance in social structures, as well as the oppressive structures themselves, educating to make this kind of change (Hannam & May 2022; Mikander et al., 2018, as cited in Kimanen, 2022a).

Literature review

Social injustice and the power imbalance

Social justice education stands uniquely compared to other examples of education. When educating about science, the field of knowledge is equal. There is nothing that it is like to experience physics differently to someone else. Whilst there might be a diverse class, the subject matter will not be uniquely tied to an individual's experience. However, in social injustice, due to class diversity, there may be some who already know well what it is like to be subject to injustice and others who have no such knowledge. There is something that it is like for a black student to have been subject to racist abuse, whilst all of us are subject to gravity in the same way, for example.

Hannam and May (2022) completed a short case study on a school that had a high proportion of disadvantaged students. This disadvantage may be a product of distributive injustice and although confusing the two for education purposes detracts from social justice, the product of that distributive injustice directly concerns social injustice here (Boyles et al., 2008). Hannam and May's (2022) case study does not discuss social justice education, but instead points out that education is about justice for young people. They found that starting with the young person's experiences produces good outcomes for the injustices that may have been present in the school. Further, these students now all took religious education and Hampshire County Council's (2021) locally agreed syllabus requires students to engage with their own experience first and then with the experience of others after, in a kind of ethnographic approach. The school in the case study has set up an initiative that attempts to deal with injustices in the community, such as schemes that allow young people to get one hot meal a day, and others that attempt to get students into work or work experience (Hannam & May, 2022). At least some of the success here is owed to the religious studies in the school, as all students are now entered into the GCSE course and the main indicator of success identified is starting with the student and ending with the student which means tending to their experience first and foremost (ibid.).

Whilst the case study is only one school in Hampshire, and potentially confuses social injustice with distributive injustice, especially in some of the examples of initiatives, which Boyles et al. (2008) identify as a potential danger, it does inform an important part of social justice education. As teachers, we need to try and reduce power imbalances to be as small as possible (Kimanen, 2022b). Kimanen (2022b) also reflects on the potential need for students to take the lead, though I would suggest social injustice education with no guidance would be difficult. From Hannam and May's (2022) case study and Kimanen's (2022b) study (which I will detail later) I find that starting with the student and trying to level out the classroom and reduce all imbalances possible is essential when educating about social injustice.

This power imbalance may also be felt by teachers. Felicia Moore (2008) completed a study that focused on trainee teachers in elementary schools in the USA and how they could (or could not) see themselves as agents of social change in their classrooms. Though this study was on science specifically, there are valuable takeaways as well as drawbacks. Her research addressed how teachers conceive of themselves as agents of change and how they understood science to be a contributor to this change (ibid.). She researched 23 trainees and gave diversity surveys that asked for initial thoughts on how to define diversity, for example, and then they got a survey on the final day of the

study that asked the same questions for reflection. I intend to use a similar method to Moore in my study, though I want to use quantitative comparison, not qualitative.

Moore's (2008) study compares the initial and final qualitative findings but the focus on final reflections is overwhelming, so there are few indications of how the teacher's agency has changed. 5 teachers engaged in semi-structured interviews and five significant themes were found from thematic analysis: change agent as institutionally granted, change agents with limited agency, change agent as a science teacher, not an agent of change, and change agent beyond classroom level (ibid.). There is no quantitative indication of how many of the 23 teachers fall into each category which would have been beneficial. Moore found that most teachers perceive themselves as agents of change at a classroom level only. Teachers seem to identify the power imbalance too (Kimanen, 2022b; Moore, 2008). One teacher identified themselves as having little control beyond the classroom level (Moore, 2008). Moore suggests lack of agency in teachers is concerning and that they need to identify themselves as agents of social change on levels beyond the classroom. Social justice education does not just start with students, but with teacher's identities too. Moore's study, completed 15 years ago, does not resonate with my personal view as a trainee teacher. I have found that my and my colleagues' attitudes are often that teachers have a fundamental role in social change. This could be down to the time that has passed and the injustices that have ignited social justice education since, or down to the nature of training in religious education, which is concerned with 'the good' or morality compared to multidisciplinary elementary education. There is also a focus on science in Moore's (2008) study; I would be interested to see if humanities teachers felt the same about being agents of change. This section of literature has identified the need to deliver social justice education on a level playing field, ensuring that students feel that the environment is just, and that the teachers realise that they can contribute to social change.

Film in Religious Education: a pedagogical note

Whilst the literature concerning film studies is vast, it lacks significantly at the intersection with social justice education. The use of film in RE is so popular in the classroom yet so absent in the body of literature concerning film. This section will focus entirely on the links between religious education and film and highlight some pedagogical upshots of using film in the classrooms, which I will later try to avoid and address in own research design. Even after searching educational databases, and notable religious journals such as the British Journal of Religious Education, I found no relevant

studies that focused on film and religious education and no studies that linked the use of film to teaching social injustice. Hence, I have adopted a more theoretical approach.

Vivienne Baumfield (2010) identifies the use of information technology (ICT) to support students concerning inter-religious and inter-cultural understanding is increasing. The article is over 10 years old but still extremely relevant in terms of its reference to using ICT. Almost all PowerPoints in RE classrooms today have embedded videos which help students experience the 'other' in a kind of ethnographic approach to learning (Jackson, 2004). Baumfield (2010) identified a significant benefit of the progression of ICT in that it enables us to open dialogue through a specific means – namely, in my study, opening dialogue in the classroom using film.

Building on Baumfield's (2010) ideas, Rodriguez-Plate (2017) discusses the impact of using film to demonstrate certain religious links and perspectives. Rodriguez-Plate (2017) identifies the connection between film and the real world. They are not, as Rodriguez-Plate (2017) says, an escape from the reality we live in but instead, a chance to engage with 'the other' through a different channel. There is a direct relationship between what goes on on-screen and off-screen Rodriguez-Plate (2017). This is why Rindge et al (2010) suggest that there needs to be a dialogue between what is being studied (in their case, the Bible) and what is being watched (in their case, films with Biblical links e.g., Se7ven). Not denying the relationship between the film and our world is likely to give students a better chance at understanding the film, as is opening, and preserving the dialogue between the two (Rindge et al., 2010). Two specific pedagogical challenges can be identified when teaching using film. Rodriguez-Plate (2017) suggests that Hollywood films rely on the audio and visual cues of 'normal' predictors of where the scene might be going. Rindge et al. (2010) focus on this problem by suggesting that a film clip out of context can lose its broader meaning or context. A second problem identified by Rindge et al. (2010) is that films are often made by American white men and hence have problems of representation or presumably result in reification. If students cannot identify the predictors in the first place, then I have concerns about whether they could identify the themes in the films in general. This combined analysis of Rindge et al. (2010) and Rodriguez-Plate (2017) on the pedagogical implications of film suggests that there is a gap to be addressed in film research, especially considering whether students can identify the themes in films when they are used in isolated context and sometimes require recognition of Hollywood predictors for the plot or scene's purpose. For example, could a student identify the discrimination against black people in The Help? (Taylor, 2011).

Teaching and learning social (in)justice

Anuleena Kimanen (2022a,b) has begun to fill the gap in research on social injustice Religious Education with two studies, one of which features in the British Journal of Religious Education, and the other in the Journal of Religious Education.

Kimanen's study into the enhancing of empathy was conducted in a Finnish secondary school, with pupils aged between 14-16 in a privileged area (in two schools). Their study focused on how students created empathy and expanded their moral circle (Dolby, 2012 in Kimanen, 2022a). The research design was entirely qualitative and spread over 5 observations, four of which were RE lessons, and one was a lesson of sociology, though still focused on social injustice (Kimanen, 2022a). All lessons were observed by the author, and 3 of 5 also had an additional passive observer (ibid.). There were also follow-up interviews after the lessons that involved 25 pupils conducted by Kimanen and/or the research assistant (ibid.).

An initial problem with Kimanen's (2022a) study is that it is in a Lutheran RE (Christian centric) context, which differs greatly from the context of RE in the UK which is more secular. This will not make it redundant, but the subject matter that arises in Lutheran RE is different from secular religious education. The data was supposed to determine how pupils understand justice and related concepts, 'empathy and information' and to determine where justice is needed and for which groups (ibid., p. 82). Observation 1 contained two activities: A drama activity related to Western History of Christianity in Finland and a Protestant and Lutheran 16th-century dialogue (ibid.). The former activity had little success and power and justice were not themes of the discussion and although the latter activity was better, it lacked significantly. Upon reflection on Hannam and May (2022) and Kimanen (2022b), I think this is likely due to these injustices being more ones of the past, which does not make them invalid examples of injustice but does distance the pupils from being able to see them as an injustice. Kimanen's (2022a) second observation group participated in a narrative of Christian justice perspectives, both historical and modern. There is minimal reference from students to the injustices that Muslims might face in being discriminated against, but no development of empathy can be identified (ibid.). This result was replicated in the 5th observation, as they did the same task which involved reading an internet stimulus and discussion of 'justice related questions' (ibid., p.85).

I think there is something to be said for the stimuli, in that it is difficult to empathise or engage with words on a page that build no wider picture without imagination or experience to relate it to. Further,

the resource used is not provided in the study, so could just be badly design. Kimanen (2022a) does not fail as observations 3 and 4 result in a discussion of being homosexual in Christianity arises and pupils can be seen as identifying stereotypes and a discussion of social injustice arises. Interestingly, this activity in observation 3 was an art-based stimuli and observation 4 was based on a dice that correlated to attributes that related to ethnic background and sexual orientation (ibid.). Based on the outcomes of the lessons and the various stimuli used, I think it is reasonable to suggest that more involved stimuli, such as the dice which directed students to themes of social justice, are better. The photo/art which allows for interpretation also yielded better results which could partially be down to resource design. There is also potential that the groups were different in their prior knowledge or engagement. In the follow-up interviews, Kimanen (2022a) ultimately finds that students do develop informed empathy from the activities but not a sense of social justice literacy or agency (ibid.).

Kimanen's (2022b) second study questions how social justice education can be paired with religious education, and what social justice identities students create in this environment. Kimanen (2022b) considers four ways in which social justice education can occur: 'learning about social justice… education into social justice… teaching and learning with social justice… learning through social justice' (ibid., p.3). The study also took place in Finnish schools which practice Lutheran RE education, meaning they focus on more deliberate Christian instruction rather than secular RE (ibid.). The three schools were all in privileged areas and only one student out of the 10 classes had a minority background – hence, the focus is on teaching justice to privileged people (ibid.). Of the ten lessons, three had no instances of social justice teaching and learning but of the other seven, 55 instances were recorded (ibid.). Kimanen (2022b), in detailing when social justice is taught and learned, talks only of the instance as a whole and provides no examples of resources that are used to teach it or how that instance came about (other than some short anecdotes which do not indicate how it is being taught). If the 10 lessons, were all taught using the same or similar resources or means, then it may have been interesting to evaluate what worked and what didn't. I have also identified this in the previous study, which was even more limited to 5 observations, though it did mention the kinds of activities being used (Kimanen, 2022a).

Kimanen's (2022b) results detail some examples of students taking up privileged and non-privileged positions when it comes to discussing social injustice. One specific example was a discussion where a student talked about how his mother works with a gay teacher who is bullied by the pupils (ibid.). The student was discussing an issue of social injustice, gender, and identity discrimination, from the

position of an outsider who had a privileged position but a position of someone willing to use that privilege to support the oppressed group – these discussions and excerpts are from teaching about and into social injustice (ibid.). The non-privileged positions were only found in one lesson (ibid.). This involved teaching education with justice. This was through a more personal example, relevant to the students, which involved them discussing who runs and who should run the school's Instagram account (ibid.). It resulted in agency being constructed in the classroom setting only, and Kimanen closes the results section by asking how this kind of interaction (teaching with justice) could inform agency toward other forms of discrimination like that against gender or racism (Kimanen, 2022b). Given Hannam and May's (2022) findings and the case of the school Instagram account from Kimanen (2022b) I think this further builds the picture that one's own experience is essential in the education about social (in)justice. What follows is that teaching about and into social injustice are closely connected (Kimanen, 2022b). Further, teaching with social injustice is most effective for pupils' developing agency, with specific reference to them discussing the school and classroom practices, compared to the vague outcomes when discussing minority groups (ibid.). However, I suggest that the methods created an unequal distribution of the four types of social justice education that Kimanen (2022b) outlined at the start. Teaching about and into social injustice were more abundant than the others, which could be down to usefulness and convenience, though I would still suggest other methods need more investigation.

Research Design and Lesson Sequence

Based on the literature above, I have aimed my research at a year 9 class who are completing a unit on equality, which included different lessons focusing on different types of discrimination. Across four taught lessons and one assessment, through three research questions (RQs) I aim to determine:

RQ1. How does knowledge of social (in)justice increase over a series of lessons (with specific reference to the use of film)?

RQ2. Can students identify the themes of social (in)justice in films?

RQ3. Is film a relatable medium for students to engage with social justice in RE?

To investigate the research questions, I focused on two specific examples of injustices: racism and the LGTBQIA+ community and their oppression. In a sequence of five lessons, the first two covered racism, using two films: The Help and Hidden Figures; which addressed various injustices against

black people, such as the Jim Crowe laws and the lack of accreditation that some black women had for their work (Melfi, 2016; Taylor, 2011). The following two lessons focused on the struggles and oppression of the LGBTQIA+ community. The main film that guided these lessons was Everybody's Talking about Jamie, and due to circumstances beyond my control, the other film I intended to use, Tomboy, was only used minimally (Butterell, 2021; Scianmma, 2011). Everybody's Talking about Jamie addressed the difficulties that students can have with sexuality and gender expression in school, whilst Tomboy focused on gender norms and the realities of wanting to be transgender. The fifth and final lesson in the sequence was an assessment in which students had to argue whether they thought equal rights had been achieved for these groups today, and they had to suggest which of the films was best at demonstrating a specific issue and why. I will now briefly outline the four lessons in turn, with specific reference to pedagogy and an outline of how the activities and sequencing of the lessons fit with the pedagogies of religious education.

The Help and Hidden Figures

The Help and Hidden Figures were similar in planning and structure. Grimmitt's (1991; 2000) constructivist approach and Robert Jackson's (2004) ethnographic approach were the main informing pedagogies for my lessons and research design. In both lessons about racism, the film clips were carefully selected and used as a discovery stage (Grimmitt, 1991). The clips acted as an 'entering device' for students, in which they can engage in a situation vicariously (ibid., p.84). For example, the first clip I showed of The Help was the trailer, accompanied by some questions which students had to answer about the clip (Taylor, 2011). This is a unique example, as it doubled as an engagement stage which introduced the central questions about a topic (Grimmitt, 2000). All the following clips had the same structure. I played the clip and got students to answer the questions after, on the accompanying worksheets. Before answering the questions, students were given time to discuss their responses with the people around them. Students would then offer their thoughts and responses in a class discussion, and in some cases, they contextualised for me (Grimmitt, 2000). The contextualisation stage is when the material that is engaged with, namely the film clips, is explained and linked to the various themes of racism that I wanted to identify (Grimmitt, 1991). For example, a clip from The Help shows a black maid (Minnie Jackson) telling herself not to be sassy when she goes for a job interview (Taylor, 2011). I contextualised this for students by questioning them, ensuring that we end up at the idea of stereotypes, and then discussing how being sassy was (and is) a stereotype of black women, and more importantly, how this is harmful. It is also important to note

that the contextualisation stage will also involve me filling the gaps in between clips so that students don't lose the overarching message and plot of the films (Rindge et al., 2010; Rodriguez-Plate, 2017). The final stage is more of a hybrid between Grimmitt (1991) and Jackson (2004). Grimmitt's (1991) final stage is reflection, which is a repeat of the discovery stage through which students are supposed to reconsider their views following the new information, gained through discovery. Similarly, Jackson's (2004) edification is about students reassessing their own beliefs given the concepts and information gained throughout the lesson (or in this case, series of lessons). Both lessons ended with these stages in mind. The first lesson finished by asking 'What examples of racism do you see in society today?' and the second lesson finished by asking 'Is the UK still racist?'. Sticking with stereotypes, such as black women being considered sassy, this stage of the lesson allows students to consider whether they are upholding dangerous stereotypes and whether society still holds these stereotypes, whilst also beginning to inform the assessment that is complete in lesson five.

Everybody's talking about Jamie and Tomboy

The lessons on the LGBTQIA+ community followed a similar pedagogical structure to the lessons on racism. For example, the first clip, which served as both engagement and discovery, was the trailer for Everybody's talking about Jamie (Butterell, 2021; Grimmitt, 1991). It was paired with a worksheet that contained questions for students to answer and discuss, based on the clip. However, in this lesson, I offered some contextualisation so that we could engage with the clips respectfully and be aware of the relevant terminology needed to discuss the issues. In the second lesson, the clips were still the driving force, but contextualisation came in different forms. For example, one of the clips in Everybody's talking about Jamie was about the HIV/AIDS epidemic and referenced some key celebrities (Diana and Freddie Mercury) and so I designed a group activity to inform students of this issue. Edification came by considering whether they/them should be the default pronouns, a discussion informed by a clip in Everybody's talking about Jamie and the edification of Tomboy will come by discussing whether the age restriction on transitioning is appropriate or not. The lessons were designed to consider the big questions around the LGBTQIA+ community and consider their struggles and oppression in history.

The Assessment

The assessment was designed with the four lessons described in mind. It had a twofold focus. The first was the application of the issues to modern Britain, with the main question being whether minority groups (people of colour and those in the LGBTQIA+ community) have achieved equal rights. The second focus of the assessment was to get students to consider which film was best at displaying the relevant issue. The application to current society was to ensure that the lessons were not too isolated and historic, and the inclusion of film is self-explanatory.

Methodology and Ethical Considerations

The three primary methods of data collection in my research were:

1. Likert scales, which also asked for student opinions.
2. Student work, namely the sheets which I designed around the films.
3. Student assessment (also with film, and more generally, school assessment criteria in mind).

These three methods of data collection all address my three research questions respectively. Further, they allow for triangulation of data. This is the primary reason why I have selected these three methods of data collection. Triangulation is a good way at increasing the validity of findings (Cohen et al., 2018). The data could be triangulated as follows: Student 1 totals their self-assessment of knowledge to 25/25. This student also demonstrates excellent responses in both the worksheet and the assessment. Therefore, their self-assessment of their knowledge is backed up by their work, increasing validity (Cohen et al., 2018). The idea of starting with student knowledge and then assessing it against their practical performance was not only good for triangulation but for practical reasons. Teenagers can be apathetic and disengaged so filling out surveys may produce inaccuracies; they may rate their ability higher than it is. They may also disregard the student opinion section. However, given the nature of the research, asking their opinion in this way was the only viable option.

Keith Taber (2013) identifies benefits of using assessments, and more generally student work, in small-scale classroom research. My justification for this was twofold. Firstly, the student worksheets would directly answer the question as to whether students can identify themes of injustice in films and allow me to thematically code these against the themes presented in the Likert scales. There was a potential practical problem with this method. Student worksheets needed to address the question

'Can students identify themes of social injustice?'. However, these worksheets could not just be without appropriate guidance toward these themes, because such research would be unethical according to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines (2018). Secondly, assessments are, as Taber (2013) suggests, an extremely useful point of data for teachers in terms of teaching, and if implemented correctly, this is also true for research. The two pieces of qualitative data paired with the quantitative nature of the Likert scales, the usefulness of which is reflected by Cohen et al. (2018), allows for a range of both kinds of data. I will now detail the three forms of data in more explicit detail, with examples of forms of collection.

The three forms of data are:

1. Subjective subject knowledge evaluation scales (from students).
2. Student worksheets (from all four lessons).
3. Student assessments.

All three of these pieces of data were from students, and it is important to note that any student work has been anonymised and pseudonyms have been used when students' work is explicitly referred to (BERA, 2018).

Subjective subject knowledge evaluation scales

Data Collection

For both racism and the LGTBQIA+ community, I created a 5-point scale with 5 questions that students had to complete at the start of the lesson. The rationale for this scale was that I needed to understand students' knowledge of the issue of social justice before engaging with it through film, to then see if film is an appropriate medium for students to learn through. The Likert scale with the five-point system was a good way to get quantitative data, whilst also enabling me to understand where and how students' knowledge increased (Cohen et al., 2018). The categories were adapted from a common scale for students to determine their position between 1 and 5, where 5 is absolute expertise/understanding and 1 was little to no knowledge (Cohen et al., 2018).

Figure 1 illustrates an example of the Likert scale item used in the study on racism, as follows:

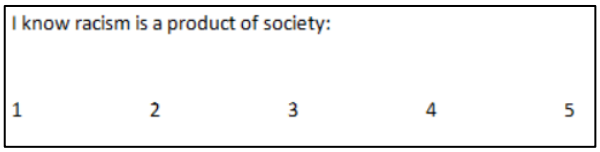


Figure 1: Racism Likert scale

Each student filled this specific 5 question 5-point scale out at the start of the first lesson on racism and at the end of the second lesson. All themes and ideas brought up in the evaluation, for example, racism as a social construct and how racism still exists today, were taught to students, to maintain ethical integrity of the study (BERA, 2018). Similarly, students completed a similar scale with 5 questions and 5 points of understanding.

Figure 2 illustrates an example of the Likert scale used in the study on LGBTQIA+ community, as follows:

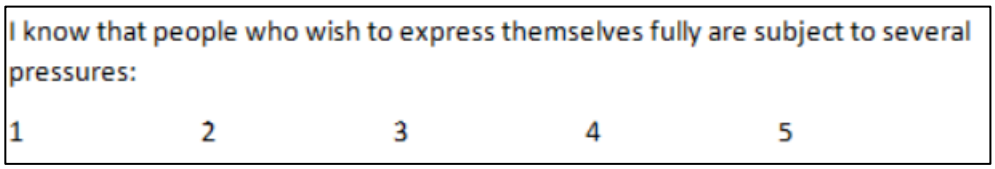
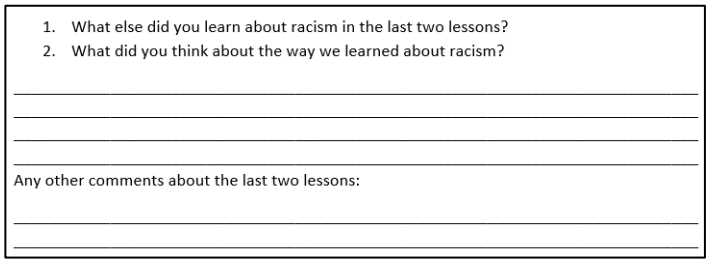


Figure 2: LGBTQIA+ Likert scale

The scales were consistent across both LGTBQIA+ and racism, as were the students. By this, I mean that the scales were always 1-5 with 1 meaning little/no understanding and 5 meaning expertise. This also avoided the problem of reverse scoring, given none of my Likert questions were 'not' questions. I put a number at the top of their sheets and the students would continue to be that number across the 4 lessons. This was to uphold anonymity of student work for reporting the data, in line with the research ethics (BERA, 2018). These scales will give me a clear indication of whether students' knowledge has increased, and the follow-up below (Figure 3, next page) will indicate whether film is a good way to engage in social justice education, from the perspective of students.

The knowledge scale given at the end of the second lesson included a section in which students were prompted to write down their thoughts on the last two lessons:


1. What else did you learn about racism in the last two lessons?
2. What did you think about the way we learned about racism?

Any other comments about the last two lessons:

Figure 3, Post-racism Lesson Form

This form and everything else that students had to fill in for this study (including their assessment) were explained clearly and partnered with a consent statement (BERA, 2018).

Data Analysis

To analyse the quantitative data from the student's responses to the Likert scales, I intend to take both class and individual averages. This will enable me to find out whether students' knowledge increased between the start of lesson one and the end of lesson two. Therefore, I can see if my implementation of film was successful or not in building students' knowledge.

Student worksheets

Data Collection

Student worksheets are the second data source for my study. These were carefully designed alongside the film clips being used, ensuring that they prompted students to identify the correct injustices being displayed, and included thought-provoking questions that would elicit discussion. The themes that students were expected to draw out were those that were included in the subjective knowledge scale discussed above (Appendix 1) though they were not limited to this, and other ideas did arise. I chose to collect data from student worksheets because it was a convenient data point that gives me a clear indication of whether students have learned from the clips. A typical worksheet included a still image from the clip, with an accompanying piece of text or speech bubble that reminds students of the important dialogue from the film, accompanied by questions that identify certain themes from the clip. A typical example from The Help, was a still image shortly after a white woman had deployed certain stereotypes against the main character (who was black). The two accompanying questions

hinted toward stereotyping informing prejudice and discrimination and directed students to consider the historic element of oppression, namely in thinking about segregation laws.

Data Analysis

To analyse student worksheets, I will use thematic analysis. To do so, I followed a method, detailed by Cohen et al. (2018). I have selected an appropriate sample of data, which happens to be all of those within the class who consented to their work being used, in line with the BERA guidelines (2018). I then created appropriate categories to code my data (Cohen et al., 2018). These categories are the five that featured in the student's Likert scales (Appendix 1) but some additional ones identified by some students, such as intersectionality (as in, oppression of both black women because they are women and because they are black), were added. I then counted the instances of this appearing in the worksheet and analysed based on the frequency of appearance (Cohen et al., 2018). For example, if a student had mentioned the history of racism on their worksheet, and there was only one real opportunity to do so in the lesson, this would be a successful indication of them demonstrating knowledge.

Student Assessments

Data collection

The final method of data collection is like the worksheets. The assessments that students did which focused on whether rights have been achieved for minority groups or not, and their opinion of which film best demonstrates the issues that we have been talking about, is a great way to see if students can successfully apply the ideas that we are considering, whilst also seeing which film students thought was good for learning and why.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the student assessments is more complex. Given that students went in a lot of different directions with their ideas, I have tried to analyse thematically, in the same way, detailed above (Cohen et al., 2018). However, the way this is presented will be as more of a supporting source of data, with students' responses and the actual content of their work being central.

Findings

I will present my findings by research question. The three research questions inform my overall aim of justifying the use of films within social justice education as a means of vicarious learning. If all three research questions are answered positively, then they will begin to affirm my overall argument that vicarious social justice learning does have value.

How does knowledge of social (in)justice increase over a series of lessons (with specific reference to the use of film)?

Racism

Students began with a high average knowledge of racism, with the class average being 21 out of 25 and an individual average of 4.2. After the two lessons, student knowledge increased from 21 to 22.3 with an average increase of 0.21 for individual students. Most damning to that average were four students who claimed their knowledge decreased. This could be due to three possible reasons:

1. Students were not taking it seriously.
2. Students have become more sensitised to the issues displayed through the lessons.
3. Students had forgotten what they scored on the first sheet.

I am hoping that the second of the three possibilities are what has happened and that students just feel more sensitised to the atrocities that racism has caused, some of which were demonstrated throughout the films. However, given that students started with a strong prior knowledge of racism, I think that the increase shown is a positive reflection of the two film-based lessons.

At the end of lesson two, some students reflected on how their knowledge had increased in specific ways. Given that The Help and Hidden Figures were based in the 1960s/70s, five different students reported that they feel like they learnt about the history of racism throughout the two lessons, whilst four others reflected on how they learnt that racism is still around today (Melfi, 2016; Taylor, 2011). Even if the average increase per student is only 0.21, it appears that using film as a means of teaching about racism does increase students' knowledge.

LGBTQIA+

In the initial LGBTQIA+ questionnaire, it was evident that students' knowledge was much lower than in the racism questionnaire, with the class average being 18 out of 25, with an individual average of 3.6. Given that students started with less prior knowledge than in the racism lessons, it is somewhat expected for their knowledge to increase more, and it did. The average increase among the class was 0.94 and the class average rose from 18 to 20.6. Notably, there were fewer students to complete the second questionnaire, due to circumstances beyond my control, so the sample size is smaller compared to the first questionnaire. Two students reported a reduction in their knowledge. One was negligible, but the second was significant. This student is likely to have similar outcomes to the students who felt their knowledge reduced in the racism lessons:

1. They didn't take it seriously.
2. They have become more sensitised to the issues; hence they scored lower.
3. They forgot what responses they had given in the first questionnaire.

Given this student filled in the racism questionnaire well, I am optimistic that the identification of the injustices faced by the LGTBQIA+ community has led to more sensitivity towards the issues.

Can students identify the themes of social (in)justice in films?

Following my methodology, I analysed students' worksheets by thematic analysis. I followed the steps from Cohen et al. (2018) to complete a successful thematic analysis. As an example, the 5 categories developed after the second lesson on Hidden Figures (2016) were as follows: social construction; history of racism; racism existing today; stereotypes (including discrimination and prejudice); and intersectionality (with sexism). The fact that the worksheet coincides with the themes in the Likert scale is important to begin triangulating data. Though due to administrative errors on both the students and my behalf, this will not be possible for the racism worksheets, because the worksheets were not appropriately labelled and including analysis of that would be dishonest.

Racism

In the first lesson on The Help, there were opportunities to address three of the four main criteria from the Likert scales, given the lessons were designed with these themes in mind. Eventually all these themes were covered for ethical reasons (BERA, 2018). This meant that all students had the

same experience of content. In the first lesson, I have decided that the criteria for success from the thematic analysis are to have mentioned the following three themes *at least* once: social construction, history of racism and stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Seventeen of the twenty-five students achieved this. The results are presented in Table 1.

Students: / Themes:	Jane	Bill	Corey	Donna	Evie
Social Construction	1	1	0	0	0
History of Racism	1	2	1	1	1
Racism existing today.	0	0	0	0	0
Stereotype/Discrimination/Prejudice	1	3	1	1	2
Sum of the instances:	3	6	2	2	3

Table 1: The Help - Table of Thematic Analysis

Table 1 shows that students can identify the issues demonstrated in The Help. However, it does not suggest that students are flawless in their identification of the themes, given that the table illustrates various levels of success. For example, Jane and Bill have met the success criteria of mentioning at least one instance of racism being a social construct, the history of racism and stereotypes. However, the other three students do not identify the theme of racism being a social construct. These 5 students had mixed results and could provide an early indication of the difficulties of using film as a means of teaching. The following is an example of a good response to the stereotypes of racism:

In response to the section of The Help where Minnie Jackson says "No sass Minnie Jackson" a student wrote (Taylor, 2011):

> *"…because it is a stereotype about black women." (Alessia, Year 9 student)*

This is a basic response, but one that shows they understand that sass is a stereotype about black women, and whether they wrote that after I contextualised the clip or not, it certainly shows understanding. In the following lesson on Hidden Figures the success criteria were similarly defined. This offered students more of an opportunity to talk about racism today than The Help but less of opportunity to talk about the social construction of racism, and so these were swapped in terms of being success predictors. In total, out of the 25 students that consented to their worksheets being used

in the study, 15 of them mentioned, in response to Hidden Figures, the history of racism; racism still existing today and stereotypes, discrimination and prejudices that are associated relevant to the black women in the film. The results of the thematic analysis are shown in Table 2.

Students: / Themes:	Isabel	George	Juliette	Allan	Adam
Social Construction	0	0	0	0	0
History of Racism	2	1	2	0	1
Racism existing today.	3	0	2	1	1
Stereotype/Discrimination/Prejudice	4	3	3	2	2
Intersectionality	1	1	2	1	1
Sum of the instances:	9	5	9	4	5

Table 2: Hidden Figures - A Table of Thematic Analysis

The data presented in Table 2 implies that there can be a high level of success in students' identifying themes. In contrast to Table 1, these students have a much higher level of success. This could be down to the film being different, and perhaps more suited to certain themes or more obvious in terms of theme identification. Further, it could imply that students' ability to identify themes within films got better, considering this is the second lesson in the series of five. However, given that these students are different to the first set of students in Table 1, the conclusions can only remain speculative.

Given that all but one of the students reached the true success criteria, and even Isabel, who did not mention racism and its existence today explicitly enough, had an excellent set of responses and ideas when it came to the other themes. An example of a response that counts for an instance in the frequency table is as follows:

Question: Why can Mary not be an engineer?

> *"She is a stupid woman, and a black person." (Jude, Year 9 student)*

This is an excellent acknowledgement of Mary's being doubly oppressed (Melfi, 2016).

Even though 8 students did not fulfil full success criteria for The Help and 10 students did not achieve the success criteria for Hidden Figures it is evident that students can, somewhat, identify the correct themes of racism in films.

LGTBQIA+

Everybody's talking about Jamie is more of a unique series of two lessons. Several students were absent in the first lesson, and a different group of students were absent for the second. Not only does this make the data more disjointed and a smaller sample size, but it also made teaching and learning in this lesson different, given around a third of the class were absent in the respective lessons.

The thematic analysis was like that of the racism lesson, with different themes being central to it. There were three main categories: Jamie and his support (or lack of) as a member of the community; gay being used as an insult; and more general homophobia/transphobia. For students to have successfully identified the themes, I suggest that they would have identified an instance of Jamie's support or lack thereof, and either gay being used as an insult or homophobia, given they are similar categories to code by. Only fourteen students consented, out of the twenty-two. Of those fourteen, all students talked about the two criteria that I had set for success, and most students (9) talked about all three criteria at least once on their worksheets.

Below is an example response concerning the word gay:

Question: "What are your experiences with the word gay?" which is linked to a clip in Everybody's talking about Jamie, where Jamie's classmate calls him gay repeatedly (Butterell, 2021).

> *"…meant to be an insult but towards Jamie it isn't." (Jenny, Year 9 student)*

This not only demonstrates students' understanding of the themes in the film, but also shows that there is a positive movement to inclusivity and understanding that the word 'gay', which has been used as an insult in school, and is definitely not one.

The second lesson, on 'Tomboy' will have to be deemed mostly unsuccessful, and so will not feature in my analysis. A combination of over half of the class being absent on a science trip, and half of the remaining students not consenting, and then the other's not being well engaged meant for a difficult lesson with little in terms of data. I have therefore omitted the data.

Is film a relatable medium for students to engage with social justice in RE?

Seven different students reflected on how they liked the way were learned about racism over the past two lessons. One of these students highlighted vicarious experience as an important way of learning. The vague comments that students gave were mostly 'I liked how we learnt it' (Mike, Year 9 student). I think, given that the lessons were so film-dominated, that this was owed to the use of clips to talk about the injustices in our society. Contrastingly, the LGTBQIA+ films did not receive the same praise. Two students made an explicit reflection on how the clips were complex and sometimes not accessible. 'Sometimes it was confusing on what to pick up from the video (Diego, Year 9 student) and another student said '[I] enjoy learning using clips but the musical clips were difficult to understand' (Jude, Year 9 Student). Whether or not film is a relatable medium to engage with social justice seems to be the most ambivalent of all my research questions.

The ambivalence continues when I was looking at students' assessments. I analysed for dominant themes that arose in their responses. Notably, four students selected Everybody's talking about Jamie as being the most appropriate film for showing issues because it is relatable, something which was an expected finding given Kimanen's (2022a) and Hannam and May's (2022) studies. Three different students reflected on how they liked Hidden Figures because there was an authentic display of the kinds of struggles that black women would have faced. From both student opinion and student assessment, the contrasting views and messages suggest that films may be a relatable medium in some instances, especially when the film relates to British schools, but films may be too complex, perhaps 'too Hollywood', to be useful for education purposes (Rodriguez-Plate, 2017).

Discussion

Whilst social justice education through film has a place in Religious Education, I have not demonstrated that it is any more successful at teaching students about injustices than the methods used in Kimanen's (2022a) study. Further, whilst students might have identified the correct themes, the worksheets contained guided questions and speech bubbles that heavily scaffold students to the correct responses and understanding. This attempts to avoid the problem of recognising Hollywood film themes that Rodriguez-Plate (2017) identifies, but the level of scaffolding may be too much to entirely suggest that students can do this. However, without the appropriate level of scaffolding, it would have been unethical (BERA, 2018). The assessment responses, the few that detailed the value

in the authenticity of Everybody's talking about Jamie, may suggest that there is definite value in vicarious learning, especially when it is so close to the student's circumstances (Hannam & May 2022; Kimanen, 2022a). However, there is an obvious limitation in that there may not be many films that are like this, and as two students identified, musical adaptations may result in more confusion. Films are further limiting in the sense that Rindge et al. (2010) did identify, though the films I specifically chose were not too tied to the White American problems that he talks about. However, it does leave us with the question of whether other films are appropriate. Film is student experience. It is clear from the narrative and discussion in the lessons, and in wider school, that students are engrossed more in cinema than ever and so I do not think that, given some of these films are based in the 60s, or the USA, that they are not student's experiences. In my professional development, I will recognise the benefits of using film to teach about issues of injustice, and other wider issues too. It may not be a preferred method to something else, but could certainly supplement lessons which is a rich, vicarious form of learning.

Recommendations

Different films need to be investigated with different age groups. Four of the thousands of films that have been created are not enough to suggest that *all* films are useful in teaching social justice education. Further, the year 9 group not only limited the age rating of the films that I could use but also made for quite a narrow age range. Therefore, I recommend that different age groups are subject to different films where appropriate. A more comprehensive account of what types of resources are used to teach social injustice and which ones are better than one another would be useful, furthering both mine and Kimanen's (2022a) research. More generally, given the inclusion of social justice education in Living Difference IV (2021), my professional experiences, and this study, should direct all locally agreed syllabi to include social justice education.

Conclusion

Film does enable growth of knowledge in social justice education. Students can identify these ideas in carefully designed and guided worksheets, though some students are either left behind, lazy, or apathetic and do not do so. Finally, assessments have demonstrated which films are preferred and for what reasons, with relatability and authenticity being cited the most. Therefore, film has a place in

social justice education, and RE, but that place falls among any successful means of teaching difficult topics. There is good reason for film to feature in lessons on social justice within Religious Education but whether it should take precedence over other methods of learning requires more research.

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Appendix 1

Example Likert Scale (Racism)

Racism – What do you know?

Circle the numbers which apply.

Do not write your name on this sheet.

1.Little/no understanding.

3.A good amount of understanding.

5. I'm an expert.

I know and understand what racism is:

1 2 3 4 5

I know racism is a product of society:

1 2 3 4 5

I know there is a long history of oppression in racism:

1 2 3 4 5

I know racism still exists today:

1 2 3 4 5

I know how prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping all contribute to racism:

1 2 3 4 5

I consent to this short questionnaire about my understanding of racism to be used in a study authorized by the University of Cambridge. I understand that my data will be used for **this purpose only** and **will be anonymized**. I also understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I consent ☐ I do not consent ☐