

CHISENHOLE PRIMARY SCHOOL – CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

CONTEXT

Celebrating Diversity was a partnership between Chisenhale Art Place and Chisenhale Primary School. This was a pilot project, researched and developed by the education co-ordinator at Chisenhale Art Place, in consultation with the headteacher of Chisenhale Primary School. Artists were employed to work with year 5 pupils.

The Director of The Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust introduced the project by giving a talk to the children, teachers, artists and project co-ordinators about Stephen Lawrence and the circumstances of his death. Upon completion of the project, the art work was formally opened by Oona King MP and attended by Tower Hamlets Mayor and the actor Leon Black, who played Stephen Lawrence in the documentary-drama screened on Channel 4.

The project ran from March – June 2001, one afternoon a week for twelve weeks.

The Project team selected and interviewed artists, who were selected on their responses to the interview questions, as well as their experience of educational arts workshops and the quality of their artwork. Pupils were also asked to prepare questions to ask the artists at the interview; 2 interview questions were based on these.

Aims

The aim of the project:

3 artists will work with the project leader, teachers and students at Chisenhale Primary School on an arts project, which will contribute to the school's plan to combat racism, in accordance with London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Lawrence Action Plan.

Objectives:

Students will study the Stephen Lawrence case, as a basis for the project, and will explore and understand the way that prejudice culminates and manifests itself. The statement by Doreen Lawrence, mother of the late Stephen Lawrence, incorporated in the citizenship booklet of the National Curriculum, "...we need to be aware of the racial diversity that exists in our society and value each individual", will form the underlying philosophy of the overall project.

By the end of the project children at Chisenhale Primary School will:

- be aware of and understand the implications of the Stephen Lawrence case;
- understand what prejudice is and the way in which racism manifests itself;
- understand what equality of opportunity means;
- have designed and produced permanent artwork based on the project to complement the school environment and inform future pupils at the school.

Description of the Project

There was an initial team-planning meeting, which focused on clarifying the aims and objectives of the project and how these would be achieved.

The class teacher asked pupils to produce sound bites exploring their own personal ideas of racism and these words were used during workshops as part of the discussions and directly as text on the walls in the final murals.

The project was introduced by a talk from Malcolm Phillips of the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust to year 5 pupils.

Malcolm spoke about the life of Stephen Lawrence, the circumstances of his death and the issues surrounding his murder. He also discussed the way in which racism manifests itself, making it accessible and demonstrable to the children. The children asked and answered questions about Stephen Lawrence and racism.

The children were then split into three groups and discussed examples of discrimination, specifically racism, with the artists, and the project was introduced.

The artists split the stairwell into five sections, addressing different themes: food, religion, clothing, the body and the playground. The aim was to "actively involve children through art to understand issues of racism".

In the following weeks the children prepared stencils for the mural on the stairwell and began to spray-paint the images directly onto the walls. The artists reinforced the project by "talking about relevant issues and exploring the concept of racism through culture, dress, food, religion, and personal beliefs"

The artists completed a frieze, working alongside the pupils on each section of wall every 2 weeks, so that pupils could see the progress of the work. As the project progressed, pupils discussed issues of race openly and the artists acted as facilitators.

The murals were formally opened 15 June 2001; Richard Gray led an assembly alongside Oona King - MP attended by Lorraine Melvin, Mayor, Leon Black- actor, the whole school, parents/carers and friends of Chisenhale Primary School.

Measure of Success

The measure of success of the project was based upon the review meetings, written evaluations from the headteacher, class teacher, pupils involved in the project, the project co-ordinators and photographs. There was also a formal opening of the finished work.

From written evaluation forms

Pupils

26 evaluation forms were returned.

- All 26 pupils enjoyed the project. 5 said they enjoyed the group work and 5 said it was their "best project"
- 18 said making the figures and spray-painting was the best part of the project.
- 13 said that there wasn't anything they disliked about the project. 4 said they disliked tidying up and 4 said they disliked other students ripping bits of the work off the walls.
- 25 said that they would take part in another project.
- 21 pupils said that there was nothing that could have made the project better.

- 10 pupils gave additional comments; of these 9 said thank you to the artists and 1 said: "Now every time I go down stairs I think how much time it takes to do that."
- "I liked seeing the work that I done. It made me feel good about myself."
- "It was fun and we learnt how to work in a group and we learnt about racism."
- "I enjoy taking part in the project and now I know art is fun"
- "I would like it if the other classes didn't rip it"
- "I liked all of it apart from tidying up"

Evaluations – teachers

"The children wondered why their own ideas weren't used. They are used to having more creative control"

"The initial session was pitched a little above the children's heads by the outside speaker, although the content was fundamental to the origin of the project."

"The artists were committed and flexible and communicated and responded to the children's own ideas and values."

"Spread these opportunities and activities to other children and teachers".

"Activities that I found most useful were the group work, opportunity for the children to give their views and assume responsibility for finished pieces."

Artists

The artists said:

- The timetabling and schedule was very successful; "The twelve week period, with work being completed progressively, gave the rest of the school time to learn from the project."
- The two-hour sessions were ideal for retaining the children's attention and enthusiasm, but did not allow for installation.
- The support was fine, but they felt that the monitoring forms were slightly pointless; they felt they gained more through discussion.
- They were pleased with the progress of the project and the children's enthusiasm, commitment and understanding of the project.

Chisenhale Art Place

The project leaders said:

- The artists were committed and enthusiastic about the project from the onset.
- All artists attended planning and monitoring meetings.
- The artists' schemes of work were detailed and clear. The aims and objectives of the project were insightful and carefully thought about.
- More time was needed for the artists to plan as a group. Additional time was needed for installation. The artists had to put in a lot of extra time.
- The issue was addressed directly, with careful consultation between all parties.

Evaluation

The final mural was very successful, containing colourful, positive imagery of different races, cultures, foods, religions and clothes. Being in the stairwell of the school, pupils, staff and visitors are able to see the mural. In order to expand upon the learning of Turquoise class, the school has agreed to allocate a class each year to maintain the imagery on the stairs.

The children were enthused and excited by the project; they were proud of the work they were doing and there was a strong sense of ownership from the children. As the project progressed, the children maintained the discussion of racism and the issue became autonomous.

Specific content outcomes were achieved, and the pupils developed practical and social skills extending their understanding of art.

The artists developed their experience of working within a primary school and produced a mural to complement the school environment. They developed positive collaboration by working together.

Chisenhale Art Place has developed a partnership with Chisenhale Primary School and successfully completed the pilot project for LBTH primary schools.

"I would like to add that the art work looks as fresh and interesting now as it did back in the summer and provokes regular comments from the children throughout the school. Some of the younger pupils can be overheard spelling out the words of the 'sound bites' that are stencilled on the walls and stairs, which can only suggest a success that Turquoise class should be proud of." - Clare Turnbull (artist).

As a result of the project, The Stephen Lawrence Gallery stencilled the images and words of Turquoise class onto their walls, and exhibited photographs and text about the work in progress during July. In addition, Greenwich Council employed the three artists to run a workshop at the Anti-Racist Festival on Plumstead Common.

Conclusion

When co-ordinating future projects Chisenhale Art Place will:

- Allow further time for planning and installation.
- Find more space for the artists to work within.
- Allow longer session times.