

JOHN SCURR PRIMARY SCHOOL – RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT RACISM

Following on from the successful project to fund Art and Drama Workshops in the school to raise awareness of and begin to explore ways of tackling racism, a series of meetings were held. These meetings involved Julie (Arts Project) Anisha (Drama Project), Year 4 & 5 class teachers whose children were going to be involved directly in the project, two teachers Flo & Mick with interest in Drama and Art respectively and Chris who coordinated the project in the school.

Outcomes of the meeting

- The project will make many links with the development needs of the school including work related to Citizenship, updating the schools anti-racist policy, development of an anti-bullying policy and the review of the behaviour policy.
- Assessment of the needs of the school in this area.
- We made a plan for a research visit by the Art & Drama Leaders especially focussing on the playground area to identify issues that could possibly be addressed through the project.
- The possible involvement of Flo (drama) to observe & work with the drama team to support the work of the project and to continue the work next year.

Julie & Anisha followed up their research visits by producing plans for their projects. These were discussed by all the staff involved and were agreed.

In Year 4 & 5 some preparatory work took place. This was mainly discussion of the various issues related to the project, i.e. relationships, conflict resolution, appreciation of diversity, experiences etc. These and ensuing discussions gave children “safe space” in which to share feelings & experiences in ways that surprised the class teachers involved. It made them aware that, although they thought they had given the children space previously, it clearly wasn't always enough. Many found themselves surprised by what the children had to say & felt they clearly needed to provide them with many more opportunities to express their feelings and concerns, especially related to racism.

The Drama Project ran smoothly. The children were very involved and the outcomes were very positive. School staff involved were very impressed with the pace of the sessions, and the way in which the children were encouraged & supported to be fully involved both directly in the drama and in the subsequent discussion around it.

The art project began with discussion of the original theme ‘the Friendship Tree’ and was followed up by drawing possible designs for a mural. These initial designs seemed to suggest the children hadn't grasped the real issues involved. Further adult input was given followed by discussion, which indicated that the children's understanding of the issues had developed. Children then came up with new ideas for the mural and the resulting designs were collated by Julie to make an overall design, which was agreed, by all those involved, to be suitable.

The children then began painting the actual mural; an experience they found both challenging & enjoyable. While the painting of the mural was being done, there were lots of opportunities for those involved to talk to parents and others passing by about the mural and what its purpose was. It was also a very practical expression(in terms of sharing materials and equipment; working together and supporting one another) of the principles for living and working together as a community, which the designs for the mural had expressed.

On completion of the mural a special assembly was held in the playground attended by all the school community including quite a large number of parents. The assembly included some of the Year 4 & 5 children explaining their designs and the finished mural. We celebrated the work that had been done and thanked the project leaders for their hard work and support. It was a very positive experience and generated a lot of interest and subsequent opportunities for discussion across the school of issues raised by the mural.

At the beginning of the new school year especially, with the recent terrorist attacks in America the mural has been a focal point for thinking about some of the issues of conflict & conflict resolution in which the project addressed very fully. It has also enabled us to consider our responses to the current situation in terms of the way in which we relate to one another as a school community.

Future Developments

- We are going to establish a School Council this year which will involve a lot of work on equality, individual rights and responsibilities, conflict resolution etc.
- It is hoped to use Flo (who participated in the Drama element of the project) to develop drama work related to work undertaken in the project.
- The work of the project will underpin all the work related to Citizenship undertaken in school this year.
- We will develop and extend the discussion work begun in years 4 & 5 latest year, which was very positive. Trying to create ‘safe space’ in which everyone can share their experiences of & feelings about racism.
- We will be involved in running training sessions for teachers on anti-racism as part of the EAZ project.
- ‘Training the Trainers’ an Anti-Racism Awareness course.

The project was a great learning opportunity for all those involved in terms of management, organisation, cooperation and flexibility. Working through the problems it threw up was both challenging and rewarding. It has given the school a renewed impetus in the whole area of anti-racism just at a time when it was much needed.