

## **OLGA PRIMARY SCHOOL - CELEBRATING DIVERSITY**

### **CONTEXT**

Celebrating Diversity was a partnership between Chisenhale Art Place and Olga Primary School. This was a follow-on from a pilot project run at Chisenhale Primary School. The project at Olga Primary School was modified in response to the evaluation of the pilot project, and developed to meet the needs and requests of the school. The team included artists, the class teacher and a co-ordinator from Chisenhale Art Place.

### **AIMS**

#### **The aim of the project:**

3 artists will work alongside a project leader, teachers and students at Olga 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 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 Olga 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.

The project ran during June/July 2001 and took place on Monday and Tuesday of each week for three weeks. One day was allowed for preparation and one day for installation.

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT**

There was an initial planning meeting with the artists and the project team to discuss the aims and objectives.

The project was then introduced by the headteacher to year 6 pupils, who spoke about the life of Stephen Lawrence, the circumstances of his death and the issues surrounding his murder. The children answered and asked questions about Stephen Lawrence.

This was followed with a talk by one of the artists, who was involved with the Chisenhale Project, in collaboration with the co-ordinator from the Chisenhale Art Place. They discussed the way in which prejudice and discrimination manifests itself and specifically discussed racism. The children were then split into two groups and discussed examples of discrimination and racism. This was followed up by the pupils preparing drawings, based on the discussions with their class teacher.

The project was scheduled to start 25<sup>th</sup> June. However, it was felt by the head and the Chisenhale Art Place that the content and outline of the workshops needed further definition and planning, so the project was delayed by one week, with an extra week added onto the end of the project.

Children then worked with the artists on drawings based on the initial discussions: "*We encouraged the children to draw on their own experiences and depict things or people which were important to them; i.e. family, friends, classmates or famous people. We also asked them to think about other races or cultures in Tower Hamlets, and to paint symbols and images associated with these.*"

In the following week, the proposal from the artists was finalised, and the artists completed designs for the mosaic based upon the drawings from the children. This was followed by six practical mosaic workshops in which the children and artists developed the final piece of work.

The mosaics were installed for permanent display in the playground, and a formal opening took place 20 July 2001. This was the last day of school for the pupils at Olga Primary School, and it was formally opened by Lorraine Melvin, Mayor of Tower Hamlets.

### **MEASURE OF SUCCESS**

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

### **WHAT WE FOUND OUT**

**From written evaluation forms.**

### Pupils

21 evaluation forms were returned.

- 18 pupils enjoyed the project.
  - 14 said sticking the mosaic tiles onto the board was the best part of the project.
  - 8 said that the main reason they disliked the project was that not many of their drawings or designs were used in the final design. 4 said that not being allowed to use the tile clippers was what they disliked.
  - 19 said that they would take part in another project, 2 said they would not.
  - 10 said that, if their designs had been used or if they had been more involved, the project would have been better. 6 said that, if they'd been allowed to use the tile cutters, the project would have been better.
  - 12 pupils made additional comments; of these 5 said they would have liked their pictures/designs to be used or be more involved.
  - "The thing I liked best about it was knowing that it would be up there for years and everyone would see our work..."
  - "I did enjoy the art project it was a laugh I liked meeting the artists"
  - "Not being able to cut the tiles for ourself made me feel like a baby"
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- "...We spent ages drawing pictures and sticking down tissue paper, cardboard, and other materials to make really nice collages, and you only used about one of them. Lots of children were upset because you didn't use their ideas that they had spent so long working on."

### Class Teacher

- "More thought needed to be given to guiding the children to develop their own ideas. The children wondered why their own ideas weren't used."

### Artists

The artists said:

- there were problems and confusion over the planning of the project sessions.
- the direction of the design, the subject matter of the sessions and how these would develop was unclear.
- the funders and the school had different ideas regarding the method of addressing racism. They felt that both Chisenhale Art Place and the school wanted a project that celebrated diversity and that the funding body wanted a project that was about racism.
- there was not enough support and encouragement from the school teachers.
- the project was tabled against other school events, so at times there were no children to work with.
- The children were disruptive and not engaging in the project.

### Chisenhale Art Place

The project leaders said:

- Not all artists attended planning meetings.
- Artists weren't given clear written briefs and deadlines.
- The artists' schemes of work were not detailed enough to merit a thorough proposal or project outline, and were not submitted soon enough.
- More time was needed in the planning stage.
- The issue was skirted around and not addressed directly. Following the initial introduction, the artists did not expand on discussions.
- The artists did not give the children enough direction and guidance.
- The school should prioritise visiting projects and give more support to artists.

### Evaluation

The final mosaic was successfully completed and installed in the proposed space in the playground. The design by the artists was a combination of children's drawings, the school logo and images developed by the artists. It includes imagery representing different cultural identity through dress, food and environment under the text "We all breathe the same air". It is colourful, positive and a permanent contribution to the school environment.

It is clear that there were problems in the planning of the content of the sessions. The artists were unclear about their responsibilities; proposals were submitted late and were not detailed enough and rushed. Therefore, the project was delayed to allow for further planning time, and the project became rushed, as it was the end of the school year. The artists were annoyed with the changes and became angry in the final planning and execution of the work. This obviously had a devastating affect on the project as a whole.

Chisenhale Art Place should have given a clear written brief and not relied on discussions at initial planning meetings. More time was allocated for planning but the artists did not direct the content of the project sessions or develop the school's and Chisenhale Art Place's feedback on initial proposals.

LBTH's managers of the race equality projects attended a review meeting at the school with the artists, and it was at this meeting that there was a discussion around whether it was a project on anti-racism or multi-cultural education. This led to further confusion with the artists, who considered it to be a multi-cultural project, rather than an anti-racist project.

This review highlighted the need to have clear aims and objectives and also a greater understanding about the issues arising from an anti-racist and a multi-cultural approach.

Although specific content outcomes were not achieved, the practical aims and objectives were. Children developed practical and social skills, extended their understanding of the issues and techniques associated with art and learned about the Stephen Lawrence case.

The artists developed their experience of working within a primary school and produced a mosaic to complement the school environment.

Chisenhale Art Place has developed a partnership with Olga Primary School.

### **Conclusion**

When co-ordinating future projects Chisenhale Art Place will:

- give clear precise written briefs
- allow further time for planning
- ask artists to bring a specific project outline to the interview
- introduce separate contracts for planning and production

liaise with the school and the artists, to ensure that time-tabling is given priority, and that the teachers are supportive of the project