

ST PAUL WITH ST LUKE C of E PRIMARY SCHOOL – CHALLENGING RACISM

Introduction

Project Aims:

To challenge racism throughout the school community and to celebrate cultural diversity within the school

Project Objectives:

From an anti-racist perspective:

- To explore issues of memory and identity
- To enable participants to develop their sense of self respect, sense of identity and respect for others
- To enable individuals within the school to feel confident when challenging racist language, behaviour and beliefs, developing an anti-racist environment through out the whole school community
- To create a focus for the celebration of diversity within the school

Project Personnel

• The Project Manager

The project was co-ordinated by a project manager working in partnership with the school co-ordinator and the head teacher. They were also responsible for ensuring the project met the aims and objectives and evaluating the project.

• The school Project Co-ordinator

The school project co-ordinator was responsible for liaising between the school staff, project manager and artist team and supporting project arrangements within the school. They were also responsible for monitoring the development of the project in line with the identified project aims.

• Artist 1- Writer

The writer used Haiku, frame and acrostic poem structures with pupils to develop poems about racism and how it effects pupils themselves, their behaviour and their relationship with one another, their families and friends both inside and outside the school. Pupils worked individually and in groups to write pieces that were then performed at the end of the project event, recorded and printed on to the project banners.

• Artist 2 – Musician

The musician used song, rhymes and words brought in by pupils representing their family's culture and developed musical responses with instruments in workshop sessions around the anti-racist theme.

Artist 3 – Screen Printer

The screen printer created images from objects brought in by pupils from home and developed anti-racist visual symbols and shapes with each pupil which were then printed onto four large collaborative banners. Extracts from their anti-racist written work was then added to the finished pieces.

Project Description

Inset Day 05/09/01

After a series of preparatory meetings between the Head Teacher at the school, the artists and project manager and the school project co-ordinator the project began with an Inset for the school staff team.

The day began with a warm up session with the artists followed by a session exploring racism and its consequences with an Anti-racist Facilitator.

In the afternoon the artists and project manager led a practical session to introduce staff to processes and approaches that were to be used on the project. It began with an explanation of the project title – The Harmony Project. The artists had asked participating teachers to bring in objects that were from their own culture and another culture that was represented in the school.

They selected objects from the following themes that were allocated to each year group by the artist team:

- Nursery - clothes/dress,
- Reception - food,
- Year 1 - transport,
- Year 2 - work/crafts,
- Year 3 – songs/rhymes
- Year 4 - games/leisure activities,
- Year 5 - religion/beliefs,
- Year 6 - local history/homeland.
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Each class teacher presented the objects that they had brought in and explained why they had selected them. They then created a screen print, a short written piece and some music on their theme and finished the day by presenting a selection of the works produced in a short performance.

This approach was then taken back to the classroom by the teachers. Pupils were encouraged to go back to their families and select an item that represented their family's culture on the class theme.

Introduction Day 10/09/01

The introduction day began with a whole school assembly that parents had been invited to attend. The entrance to the school had been decorated with the artwork that the teachers had produced during the Inset session.

The assembly began with the head teacher introducing the project, outlining its aims and introducing the project team. The staff team then repeated their Inset day performance back to the children and their parents and explained how they had produced the artwork.

For the rest of the day the artist team worked their way through each class introducing themselves and discussing the particular class theme with the pupils and creating either a collaborative poem or screen printed banner or singing a song together.

Artist Workshops 24/09/01 – 19/10/01

Two weeks later the artist began workshops with each class. Each year group was expected to participate in sessions in all three of the disciplines – music, writing and screen printing. In some cases the artists worked together in a class combining poetry and writing with music, for other session classes were split in two with one group focusing on music while another concentrated on writing. Each class had one day developing images that represented harmony/anti-racism linking to their particular class theme and objects brought in from home. These were then screen printed onto four large collaborative hall banners. The writing component included the development of frame, haiku and acrostic poems, song lyrics and written statements on 'Harmony' and anti-racism. Written fragments of poems and songs were also printed onto the hall banners. The music sessions developed songs and instrumental pieces influenced by the project themes and drawing from a variety of western and non-western musical traditions. The output from each class was fashioned into a piece that could be performed on the performance day at the end of the project.

Parent/Carers Workshops 01/10/01

Two sessions were organised during the project for parents/carers and governors of children at the school with the three artists working together similar in structure and content to the teachers Inset sessions. These sessions were advertised well in advance and a crèche was provided to encourage the fullest participation. Participants developed poems, music and individual screen printed pieces on the Harmony/Anti-racism theme which were then displayed in the hall at the project performances.

Project Performances 19/10/01

Outcomes from the project were performed to the whole school, parents/carers and visitors from the wider community in two performances – Key Stage 2 in the morning and Key Stage 1 in the afternoon. The performances featured the dramatic unveiling of the hall banners, music and songs, poetry and writing from each year group and lasted over an hour each. Year 6 children from a neighbouring Primary School also attended the event with their head teacher and class teachers and helpers.

Evaluation and Follow Up

At the conclusion of the project the artists met with the project co-ordinator in the school for an immediate evaluative response they then submitted their own written evaluations over the next week. The head teacher also gave a verbal feedback to the team. Separate evaluation forms were written for teachers and Key stage 1 & 2 pupils in consultation with the school staff team, then posted on a web site to enable all those linked with the project to submit their responses on line. Work began accumulating the outcomes from the project in the form of poems, songs, writing and visual material to form the basis of the new school web site.

Project Evaluation

The objectives as outlined in the initial proposal were met in the following ways:

Aims:

To challenge racism throughout the school community and to celebrate cultural diversity within the school

The processes used to explore racism/anti-racism with the artists enabled staff, governors, parents and pupils to challenge racism throughout the school community. Through addressing racism, its cause and effect explicitly in the classroom and after school sessions the artists were able to facilitate discussion, visual and written work with pupils that clearly challenged racism in the school community.

The bringing in of objects and items from home that represented children's own culture provided a platform for celebrating the cultural diversity within the school in the classroom, at the project performance and in the work that is now permanently displayed in the school.

Objectives:

From an anti-racist perspective to explore issues of memory and identity

This objective informed our decision to begin the project with children presenting something from their own culture to the class as a starting point for exploring the theme of the project. Pupils interest in each others different cultural traditions and stories was greatly stimulated through the project experience.

From an anti-racist perspective to enable participants to develop their sense of self- respect, sense of identity and respect for others

This was achieved through discussion and resulting creative exploration with an emphasis on how name calling, disrespectful comments and bullying undermines confidence and self-respect.

From an anti-racist perspective to enable individuals within the school to feel confident when challenging racist language, behaviour and beliefs, developing an anti-racist environment through out the whole school community

Racist language, behaviour and beliefs were challenged with each class group with the project providing a safe and open forum for exploring how each child is effected by manifestations of racism and the holding of racist beliefs. Evidence can be seen in the written outcomes, images and songs produced that pupils went to some depth in challenging racism between themselves and as experienced in the broader community.

Project Strengths

- The performances at the end of the project were very successful. The children read their anti-racist poems and statements and sung their songs with great confidence and the unveiling of the banners was a dramatic and effective moment. The artists were impressed with how many parents and friends of the school attended and how much they clearly appreciated it.
- Parental response to the project has been very good – many attended the performance at the end of the project and informal comments from them and others from the local community that attended were unanimously positive.
- The banners created by the children are now displayed permanently in the school hall and are used to reinforce the anti-racist on a daily basis.
- The pupils involvement in evaluating the project facilitated via the on-line evaluation forms was very effective in reinforcing positive outcomes resulting from the project
- Unexpected additional benefits occurred as a result of the Harmony Project. These have included the development of a school web site designed and built around the outcomes of the project and the creative team continuing anti-racist work within the school and with the neighbouring school.
- The parent's sessions worked well, those involved enjoyed themselves and really grasped the issues producing powerful and explicitly anti-racist outcomes.
- The assembly at the beginning of the project was a good idea– it created an impact within the school and linked with the parents that attended. The staff performed well and the children enjoyed it.

Improvements

- It was felt that the project would have been improved if it had not been run at the beginning of term. Staff who were new to the school were only just getting to know their class so were put at a disadvantage.
- The project would have been improved if the project manager had been involved from the beginning. The project was delayed after the initial consultant withdrew. At this point the school had already developed the proposal, identified the project's aims and objectives and recruited two out of three of the artists involved.
- At times artists and staff addressed anti-racism without first exploring the full negative aspects of racism. In evaluation discussions it was felt this stemmed from a culture within schools of accentuating positive behaviour without dwelling on behaviour that is negative. The project could have been improved by allowing children to explore more the true nature of racism and its negative impact on everyone in society.