

WOOLMORE PRIMARY SCHOOL – ‘KNOWING ME KNOW YOU’ PROJECT

Aims & Objectives

1. To develop further the pupils' self-esteem and self-identity- cultural identity - self-identity – who am I?
2. To focus on the need for pupils to feel good about themselves before they can really get to know and relate to others well.
3. To focus on issues of how pupils get to know each other; communication, similarities and differences and the basic needs that all children have.
4. To build on the existing good practice with regard to emotional literacy to help pupils face and have strategies and skills to deal effectively with different aspects of learning together. In their own class and with pupils from all year groups.
5. To focus on how to encourage pupils to learn; how to describe and deal with their feelings – anger/sadness/happiness; that it is okay to be angry, but how to deal with this anger.

Timescale & Deliverables

The preparation and meetings/research for this project were carried out in the Autumn and Spring Terms 2001. The following activities took place:

- Initial meeting with the Head Teacher and the External Manager of the Project to ensure that the project met with the school's identified needs.
- Meeting with the team to be involved with the project – art teacher/drama teacher/parent co-ordinator, personal, social and health education co-ordinator
- The team meeting with staff from within the school.
- Observation and discussions with the pupils and staff.
- Feedback from the observations and discussions with some of the pupils in the playground, during lunchtimes and during classroom activities – issues identified for the team to write the proposals for the art and drama liaison.

Curriculum Development with all year groups – Art

Expression through Mask Making

During the ‘KNOWING ME - KNOWING YOU’ project the children were encouraged to work with other children of different gender and race with whom they may usually tend to avoid working . This included observing and making a portrait of each other, writing a sentence about the other person's feelings, making an expressive mask of themselves based on the other person's drawing, and finally discussing their experiences together.

Much of the work they did encouraged breaking down cross-cultural barriers that obviously exist. The children were challenged to really observe and express what they saw in each other through their drawings - and to take a closer look at how others might feel in a situation of racism or bullying.

At different stages of the mask making process, we were able to emphasise the emotional and physical similarities of all people; two eyes, a nose and a mouth; anger, sadness, happiness etc. All of the children could relate to these things.

Most of the creative work was non-verbal. This was particularly effective for the children, whose spoken English was not particularly fluent, as this helped to eliminate a certain tendency, where people may add prejudicial views towards those with perceived language difficulties.

Whether or not the project has encouraged new friendships remains to be seen, but by using creative art as a universal language and educational medium, issues such as racism and bullying have been explored and expressed more openly and without fear amongst the children.

All children from years 1 to 6 made and completed a mask. Years 1 and 2 had only half a day each with me, and therefore finished painting their masks with their class teacher during the week. I found the children extremely receptive and they responded thoughtfully and intelligently to discussions about racism. They had a high level of emotional vocabulary for their age, especially as English was their additional language. The children worked well in pairs and I noticed that many helped each other with the more dexterous tasks of cutting and sticking. After completing their masks with their class teacher, the children used role-play as a vehicle to experiment with or express their feelings, wearing their own mask or swapping with someone else.

Years 3 to 6 had one full day each, divided into two half days. We were able to discuss all of the issues around racism, bullying and self esteem, and also go into the cultural and religious significance of masks throughout history.

The first session that each year group of children had with me to construct the mask was always tight for time, as there were many new skills to learn and intense tuition needed, but we always managed to get the first stage completed so that the masks could be left to dry for the painting stage.

The painting stage was much more relaxed and familiar, and this was useful, to introduce more discussion and reflection related to the KNOWING ME - KNOWING YOU project. I noticed that many of the children had difficulty asking their drawing partner a question about their feelings. They found it even more difficult to listen to the answer. More work could be done in this area to broaden self awareness and awareness of others.

I would recommend that follow-up work be done with the class teachers, using the masks for role-play, incorporating some of the exercises used by the drama group to act out racist scenarios and discuss the outcomes. The masks could also be used to 'step into someone else's shoes', and to develop more of an awareness of everybody's similarities.

Mask making of this nature could be incorporated into the curriculum as a means to cover a wide span of subjects; creative art, drawing and observation, 3D awareness; the cultural, historical and religious use of masks; linking with racism, self esteem, communication skills and self knowledge.

Drama Review

Our aim throughout this project was to encourage the young people to explore their own individuality and build relationships with their peers, placing particular emphasis on racial and cultural diversity, while challenging prejudice.

We did this by using forum theatre, 'hot-seating', drama games, freeze-frames, improvisation and discussion.

Objectives – how they were achieved

- To entertain and stimulate discussion.

We feel that we achieved this objective by creating a safe environment for the children to express themselves creatively. We provided a wide variety of activities for the children to participate in and we also performed drama scenarios for years 5 & 6

- To equip the young people with tools to make friends more easily:

Through the use of drama games and fact-finding exercises we encouraged the children to think more closely about their peers and practice teamwork. We put them into groups/ pairs with children they wouldn't normally choose to work with and mixed colour and gender. We found the children to be resistant at first, particularly when mixing with those of the opposite sex, however they soon co-operated by becoming involved with the exercises. We would strongly recommend continuing with these exercises and mixing the pupils during circle time. These exercises are outlined in the teacher's pack.

- To help them to realise that racial & cultural diversity is to be celebrated

We did an exercise where we encouraged the children to point out the visible differences between us. In doing this we opened up discussion about differences and similarities within the group and the ways in which people identify themselves with others. It seems clear, having worked at Woolmore School, that all the staff are committed to realising the above and a lot of work is done on the subject.

- To begin to help them to express emotions which they may perceive as undesirable or embarrassing

We mimed various emotions with the children and showed how facial expression and body language is a universal form of communication.

We agreed on events or situations, which make us all feel happy, angry or sad – the emotions that the children always identified. The children were very open when discussing the cause of different feelings for them personally. They very much enjoyed acting out their emotions, which gave us the opportunity to illustrate how important this can be in real life. Almost every group identified racism and bullying as two of the causes of sadness or anger. We recommend that the children are encouraged to identify and discuss other more complex emotions by the use of this exercise.

- To give them increased confidence and self-esteem as individuals within the school.

We played games with the children such as the self-esteem game and the ambition game. The object of these games was for them to find qualities in themselves and others that made them feel proud and valued. Exercises of this kind worked with the majority of the children. There were a few individuals who found these games particularly difficult but, even with them, the process served as a useful barometer for the teachers to measure the self-regard of the child in question. Conversely, some children surprised and delighted the staff by being extremely open and positive about themselves and others.

- To provide them with strategies to deal with conflict in a constructive manner

With years 5 & 6 we used forum theatre to explore conflicts of the kind that often arise within the school. We showed how these conflicts can often lead to racial abuse and inappropriate behaviour which in turn leads to upset and trouble. We asked the children to suggest other ways in which the characters could respond to conflicts they faced. Some children even took the place of the actors in order to do this. With year 6 the exercise worked well, despite time restrictions that were beyond our control. With year 5, children who had been disengaged through parts of the sessions became involved and made good, considered suggestions.

General Findings and Recommendations

We found the staff and head to be very supportive and interested throughout the project and their feedback afterwards was very useful. We also noticed that, on the whole, the children were very supportive towards each other and the less confident children were helped and encouraged by the others. Having worked closely with year 5, we found them to be very bright and open and, as the sessions went on, they became more involved and confident when presenting their ideas. This seemed largely due to the enthusiasm and encouragement of their teacher Steve, who we found to be extremely helpful throughout.

We recommend that the teachers use the exercises in the packs, not just as follow up work to the project, but also as useful tools to help give the children increased confidence and self-esteem.

Reactions/Behaviour of Children Involved

Generally the children were very attentive and responsive during the sessions and seemed to work well together. The following are some of the issues raised by them, which we feel are worth recording with regard to future work on anti-racism and diversity within the school.

- When pointing out visible differences between us (Ben and Anisha) we found that years 1 & 2 took a long time to identify a gender difference but pointed out the skin colour difference. Years 5 & 6 took a longer time to feel comfortable enough to point out the latter.
- The majority of children in all the year groups who were lacking in confidence vocally was girls.
- In every year group the children seemed to separate themselves strongly along lines of gender.
- One of the children, who is of “mixed race”, repeatedly identified racism as an issue for themselves in everyday life.
- There were conflicts in the playground during lunchtime that needed to be addressed by the staff in afternoon registration. This significantly cut into our afternoon session, particularly with year 6. However, we understand that situations of this kind are often unavoidable.

Some Comments from the Children

- “You’re both from different religions” (the assumption that difference in skin colour automatically indicates a difference in religion)
- “You speak English and Anisha speaks Bangladeshi heritage” (again assumptions made relating to skin colour)
- “You’re English and Anisha’s Bangladeshi heritage”
- “I feel angry when someone does a racist attack”
- “You feel angry when your brother hits you with his leather belt”
- “Just because he’s white doesn’t mean you should be nasty to him”
- “On our island no-one is allowed to make racist remarks”

As a part of the school’s Inclusion Day, workshops were held on terminology and definitions with regard to an anti-racist approach; these were as follows:-

Participants were placed into small groups and were asked to discuss:

- a) What the words meant
 - b) Were the words considered to be ‘acceptable’ or ‘unacceptable’.
- Black
 - Afro/Caribbean
 - Coloured
 - Half-caste
 - Mixed Race
 - Dual cultural heritage
 - Ethnic
 - Oriental
 - West Indian
 - Non-white
 - Immigrant
 - Host country
 - Third World

In small groups, participants were also asked to write the definitions down for the following words:

Definitions

- 'Race'
- Racism
- Racial Incident
- Ethnocentric
- Black
- Minority Ethnic
- Prejudice
- Discrimination
- Multi-Cultural Education
- Anti-Racist Education
- Positive Action

Recommendations:-

There is some excellent practice on racial equality evidenced at Woolmore Primary School. Further consideration could be focused on the following areas:

Racial Equality Policy and Guidelines - to ensure that the work already carried out can be built upon in a consistent and coherent manner.

Staff Development on Anti-Racism and Education – A shared understanding with all staff with regard to Institutional Racism, History of Racism, Language, Values & Beliefs, Prejudice and Discrimination.

Curriculum Development - Audit all aspects of the curriculum, including religious education and history, to ensure an anti-racist and a multi-cultural education curriculum. Develop citizenship and personal, social and health education by building on the packages of materials provided by the art and drama facilitators

Acknowledgements

We all thoroughly enjoyed working in Woolmore School, because of the commitment and enthusiasm of all the staff, teaching and non-teaching. We all found the children to have different perceived and received experiences with regard to racism. There was a great deal of understanding about the hurt that the lack of friendship and exclusion created for individuals and groups of children. The aims of the project were to ameliorate such situations.

We were also very aware that the teachers, teaching assistants and members of the school community were already working together on creating a safe and secure atmosphere for all the children, and that we were there to 'add value' to the existing excellent practices that we observed during our visits to the school.

We would, however, like to ask the school to find out from the children and the teachers how they now feel, as a result of the work we have all carried out at Woolmore School. A big thank you must go to the head teacher whom we all found receptive, enthusiastic, and who worked tirelessly with us on achieving our aims.