

Garden Project. Aggie Freed, Carville Primary School.



The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact across the education sector. Our school is based in an area with high levels of deprivation and we are seeing the impact throughout our school community through a decline in mental and/or physical health. We are working tirelessly to provide a safe, stable environment for children after 15 months of upheaval and change. As part of that we have been reflecting on our

“whole School offer” and have been working to return to building whole school projects, visitors and out of school visits into our curriculum.

Recent research from Wallsend Children’s Community showed that our children don’t have access to safe outdoor spaces and our older children don’t feel safe in local park areas, so we needed to provide opportunities for children to explore nature and the outside world in a safe and contained way.

In my role as the licensed Thrive practitioner, co-ordinator of Art, Design and Technology, and the school garden lead I wanted to develop a whole school project that would use these areas to support our children. Prior to the pandemic I was working towards the RHS school garden scheme Level 3 award, and after a year of being inside and using technology I wanted the children to really focus on working outdoors, along-side nature and being creative.



The Project:

The project would be split into two halves, the first being a day in the garden where all classes worked to develop the space and enjoy a creative process activity and the second being a Take One Picture Day (TOPD).

I really wanted the children to begin to gain some gardening skills with a view to growing food with parents, sharing recipes, and supporting healthy

eating. I also wanted to embed the children’s feeling of ownership over the space to give them and our wider school community a sense of place.

TOPD would then continue to build upon this, we would use elements from our garden and grounds to support our work. This would raise the profile of Art and Design within school and tying together two separate strands that are both creative and used to support mental health.

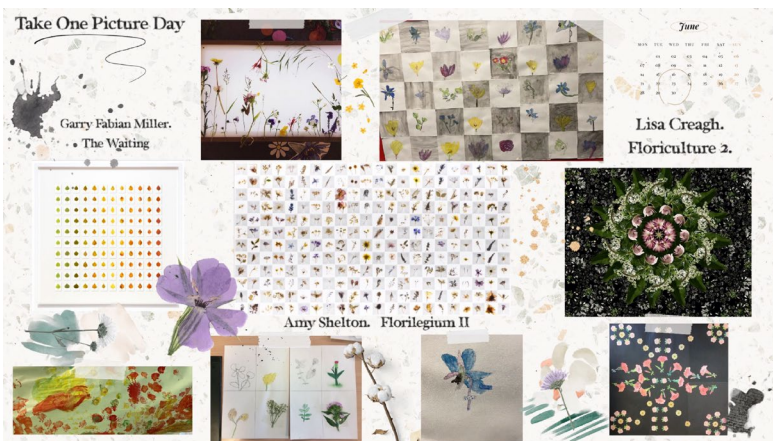


The Challenges/Development

Despite a supportive staff and leadership team there were some challenges with developing and delivering the project.

The biggest conversation was around Covid recovery and the “catch-up” curriculum, this presented issues around timetabling as there are daily “non-negotiables” for each class. Following discussions with SLT around the emotional needs of our children and the benefits of the project I then needed to support teaching staff to see these as valuable learning experiences for the pupils and that despite worries about “going off timetable” and leadership expectations this project was important and appropriate for our children.

I supported staff to see these as positive additions - supporting children’s mental and physical health, expanding their experiences and opportunities and giving them life skills - rather than detracting from the curriculum.



Children’s work/ Celebration

The children responded very well to the project. They were excited and inspired.

Many of the older children were not used to exploring the space and have since requested to “work” in the garden during break and lunch time. They have really taken ownership of the space and have been sharing developments with staff and their families. Seeing the first red strawberries was particularly exciting!

I provided three artworks for staff to choose from for TOPD all based around gardens and plants. The children were really engaged across both days, forming links between what they had seen in the space and the artworks they were exploring. Engaging with the artist on social media was a real “buzz” and our children were thrilled to receive feedback and praise from one of the chosen artists.



Next Steps

Long-term I want to continue to develop the garden space alongside the children, continuing to upskill children and staff in their gardening skills, knowledge and confidence, whilst supporting the Art, Design and Technology curriculum.

Once it is safe to do so we are also looking to extend invitations to parents and the wider community to share in the children’s success and to work alongside children in the school garden providing a focal point for the wider community, skills and home grown food.