



South Gosforth First School
'Roots to grow and wings to fly'

South Gosforth First School Cultural Leadership Project

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'Cultural Capital as an integral part of the curriculum planning process'



**CURRICULUM:
KEY DRIVERS AND INTENT**

Our Curriculum is Centred around 4 Key Drivers:

Character – Our attitudes, morals and beliefs; what type of people we are.

Culture – Our ethos; our ability to draw upon our experiences of the world.

Creativity – Our ability to think for ourselves; to imagine, inspire and innovate.

Challenge – To learn and develop through testing and stretching our own abilities.

These concepts lie at the heart of everything that we do in school – they inform our curriculum and are 'lived' every day through our ethos and culture.

Our Curriculum Intent Statements are:

To enable our pupils to meet and exceed national curriculum expectations

To enable our pupils to be confident, fluent readers who read widely and for a range of purposes

To enable our pupils to be creative, critical and divergent thinkers who approach problems with a positive and resilient attitude

To enable our children to follow their own lines of enquiry and apply their knowledge and skills in a range of real life contexts

To teach our pupils to be responsible, global citizens who appreciate what they have, show empathy for others and celebrate diversity

To encourage our children to celebrate achievements, understand what they are good at and appreciate that everyone has something special to offer

To teach our pupils to be confident, articulate speakers who can develop and express their ideas in a thoughtful way

To equip our pupils with the skills to be emotionally intelligent and to have a strong set of core values

Our curriculum is designed to incorporate all of these elements and we provide 'enhancements' in each curriculum area to ensure that our pupils have multiple opportunities to demonstrate all of these skills.

In addition to our whole school curriculum intent, we also have subject specific intent statements which directly link to all of these areas.

(South Gosforth First School Website)

The Project. What did we want to achieve?

The focus for my project was all around curriculum development and how to make cultural capital a true, integral element within it. We had identified 'culture' as one of our key drivers and as a school we wanted to really think about what that meant in practice. In the academic year 2019-2020 we had reviewed our whole curriculum with subject leaders taking responsibility for their subjects, whilst engaging the whole staff in ideas, feedback and identifying what we initially referred to as 'enhancements'. In 2020-2021 we started to see that 'enhancements' should not be an add on but part of the whole curriculum offer, working in partnership with all of our lessons, rather than being an exciting extra.

Through the first session in the Cultural Leadership program I began to think more about what culture actually was. I began to investigate how it was a social justice for it to be part of every section of school life from assemblies, lessons and the opportunities we provided to all of our stakeholders. We had just embarked on a series of new initiatives and projects that I felt could really add to this offer if they became fully part of the staff ethos and school provision.

These initiatives were:

- No Outsiders – a vision for inclusive education, promoting community cohesion to prepare young people for a successful life as global citizens.
- Dance City 'Make your move' – a project with the theme of 'Diversity' linked to the No Outsiders initiative.
- 'No Voice Too Small' with Unfolding Theatre – a community based drama project targeted primarily at Pupil Premium children and those who the school think could benefit from a purposeful, child-directed drama project.
- Voices of Virtue – a gospel choir working across the whole to school to write, share and perform a new South Gosforth First School song.
- 'Mantle of the Expert' – training and delivery in school of sessions inspired by this drama-based curriculum and assessment strategy.
- To achieve the 'Wellbeing Award for Schools' - Optimus Award Place.

(This was one of two Cultural Leadership projects running alongside each other in school.)

Project aims:

- To fully embed the idea of cultural capital as part of our curriculum planning and provision.
- To use drama, music and the arts to engage, inspire and enhance the curriculum provision in South Gosforth First School.
 - To promote positive mental and physical health in school.
- To engage with external professionals to give our children a wider 'cultural experience' and widen opportunities and aspirations.

The journey ...



March 2021:

March was the launch of the Cultural Leadership course and when we started thinking in terms 'culture' and what that really meant? As a SLT we quickly realized that we did not want it to be an add-on. We wanted it to be part of who we are. Our own personal school culture. In terms of leadership within the school we were extremely lucky that we had full support from the Headteacher as he had been a major driver in developing and questioning this in the first place.

I suppose our major hurdle initially was not interest (there was plenty of that) but ensuring that the staff were not overwhelmed with increased workload after a difficult 18 months working through a global pandemic. We used the Training Day as a vehicle for sharing these ideas and linked them strongly to the curriculum (our core curriculum and Covid-recovery curriculum statement) that they had written, which showed them that this was a way to deliver these objectives rather than anything 'extra'. Interest was high but they were cautious, which was understandable.

The projects were discussed in detail, well planned and staff volunteered to be involved directly or in a support capacity. This worked well and the links with the external professionals were shared.

Parents were initially also a little cautious as they obviously already had concerns about their children 'missing vital education' during the lockdown. We held parent information sessions online and through emails and they quickly came on board as we explained the benefits, and also the plans in place, to ensure that staff would ensure a balance of curriculum time. Difficult conversations were also held around those children who were not chosen which was tricky, but we had to be honest about in school projects that they could do and the funding / criteria requirements linked to the dance and theatre projects.

We held meetings with the dance, theatre and choir professionals over Zoom to ensure all arrangements were in place in plenty of time to ensure a smooth delivery.

April 2021:

April brought another Cultural Leadership course which enabled us to think about the project and how it was developing through these new working partnerships. It was very well timed as we began to consider, costings and organizational issues.

Dance City was ready to go, Voices of Virtue had agreed on a new remit (we needed to negotiate the original offer to match it to school needs) and the 'No Voice too Small' project was underway. Due to the planning in advance this went smoothly although some activities had to be completed online or in school due to restrictions. The rule of any leadership project – things do not always go smoothly so be ready to adapt.

This month we had whole Teaching staff training on 'Mantle of the Expert' over 3 sessions and staff were very keen to engage in this whole school focus. They began planning which topic area in their Summer curriculum would be best suited for this. Being able to work together as a team really helped with ideas and as a leadership strategy helped to get everyone on board.

May 2021:

May saw all the external and internal projects up and running. This brought with it a great amount of delegation, understanding and teamwork and showed how initiatives like this need everyone to be committed and interested in order to strive for success. Due to the high levels of engagement and interest in the activities the staff and children were very flexible and accommodating when it came to hall timetables etc.

What really came through was the appreciation and acceptance among children, staff and our families that we needed to be doing projects like this for the well-being and positivity of everyone involved. As we were following the Covid recovery curriculum there was an understanding that lessons could be taught in sections and it was ok to have mind breaks, to plan and deliver sessions that were about looking after ourselves and enjoying being back together again in classes and other 'bubbles'.

June 2021:

By June it was all steam ahead! The Voices of Virtue choir was working with the whole school and what a lift for everyone it was. We could sing! The children and staff did have major 'stage fright' at first but soon got into the swing of things. The remit of writing a whole new school song made it so personal and the children (and staff) could not believe that they were going to have a real song just for them!

This month also started to see the Dance City and Unfolding Theatre projects really take off towards their final performances in July. Feedback from staff, children and families has been in the main hugely positive. (There are always a few tricky conversations to be had about fulfilling the homework requirements.) These two projects were for KS2 but the Mantle of the Expert focus and the choir were for everyone which boosted everyone's spirits and led to some very exciting tweets and Facebook posts to share the experiences with our wider community. It was very frustrating that we could not have parents in but we managed to include that issue into our Mantle of the Expert storylines so we found the silver lining.

CHALLENGE

Challenges we faced along the way:

- Workload – a major factor in the success of this term’s work has been preparation. Things had to change as we went along, particularly with restrictions changing, but the detailed planning at the outset helped us to get through this.
- Difficult conversations – These took place with parents and families around the dance and theatre projects. There were a few families who did not want their children to be involved and others who did. We managed to explain carefully our decision for the choices made and also the requirements of some of the projects linked to their funding. In school activities supported those who were not involved and curriculum coverage was monitored carefully for those who were.
- Organisation – Some of the restrictions with Covid had an impact on us and made us rethink how to deliver or share activities but other difficulties were just part of being a busy school. Involving people in decisions, sharing information and generally being honest and apologizing about those last minute changes, when needed, worked well.
- Teamwork – as with any busy workplace sometimes relationships with certain individuals got strained. As an individual I found that being calm, preparing for conversations in advance and having well-prepared reasons for choices to hand came in very useful and issues were addressed, resolved and we moved onto better things. The work around difficult conversations has been shared with the wider SLT.

Impact:



- Staff have already started planning ahead with similar type projects for next year's planning.
- We have started developing and identifying 'cultural capital' within our planning rather than adding it on.
- We think about it whenever we are thinking about anything school related.
- 'Mantle of the Expert' is the children's current favourite activity! 😊
- We have productions to deliver and watch in July – on a stage or in the hall ... we will still enjoy them. (We are resilient and are enjoying the creative process.)
- We have a school song that we are trying to learn and we cannot wait to share it with our whole community at every school event from now on.
- As a SLT we are trying to think even more about what it means to be a team and which of the nine influence strategies we use the most. We have got the staff thinking about that too.
- On a personal basis I have started to plan out difficult conversations in a much more organized and structured way.

Reflections on culture, leadership and learning:

We do not learn from
experience . . . we learn from
reflecting on experience.

John Dewey

The following are particular areas where I have considered my own practice carefully and shared this with colleagues so that they can too.

- Nine influence strategies
- Lewin's Change Management model
- Structuring difficult conversations

References to the Cultural Leadership program and related research:



(References are linked to this course where full lists are registered.)

South Gosforth First School

