

Here We Are...Reconnecting through the Arts and Culture.

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Vision

As Arts Team Lead at SELEfirst School, an Artsmark Platinum school, I am always looking for new ways to engage children in Arts and Culture. Our school is situated in an area of Northumberland rich in culture and heritage however, due to the pandemic; children have not had the usual access to their surroundings, artists and cultural partners. With most of our children, accessing their learning from home, with many families and children losing motivation, we were in need of an injection of energy. The project was stimulated by the book 'Here We Are: Notes for Living on Planet Earth' by Oliver Jeffers. Children were encouraged to think as wide as the solar system in week 1 and by week 5 reflect on their family and themselves.

At a time when children's mental health is high on the government's agenda and a priority in schools, the project was the perfect vehicle to support children's wellbeing and support families during a challenging time.



Challenges

The model for this project was straight forward, one day a week for five weeks was for our 'Here We Are' project, children came off their regular timetable to focus on the project. Children across school and at home were working from the same menu of activities and households were working together as researchers. However, it was clear, time was an issue. Staff workload was high, preparing work for in school provision, home learning and the project. Looking at Spiro's model of Leading Change Step by Step, this was a time to call in the 'early wins'. Using pupil voice and evidence of the work and collaboration taking place in the early weeks was needed to keep staff motivated and engaged. Also at this stage it was clear some staff were not fully committed to the project. Face to face conversations and general reminders with key staff were effective in gaining trust and driving the project forward.

Development

This project was designed to connect children through their home learning and school provision during lockdown. I identified a team of staff from across school including senior leaders and the idea was shared. At this stage all staff 'bought into' the project. Staff moral was high within the team and workload was distributed within the team. Staff were able to use their own expertise to add to the project. In addition to this, the role of this main team was to communicate with sub teams made up of the other members within their year group teams, create resources and feedback any issues. It was vital that the project was engaging for all, launch videos, menus of activities, artwork, researcher packs and uniforms were prepared and the project was ready to go! Staff met in person and virtually to communicate ideas and key dates. The school's learning platforms and social media were used to share information with children and families.



Outcomes

Through pupil and staff voice it was clear the project had a positive impact on wellbeing. Children were less anxious about returning to school as they knew they were doing the 'Here We Are' project and children felt connected with those who were working at home. Using a class blog, children were able to comment on their peer's work and staff looked forward to project day. Feedback from parents ahead of termly consultation was very positive about the project; *they are enjoying school- especially Here We Are; they really enjoyed learning about space and making a telescope on Here We Are days, noting specific examples from the project.* In a recent governor's visit, one child spoke at length about the project and the impact it had on them. The whole school show case of children's work was shared via the school's learning platforms, social media and a display highlighted the connectivity achieved through the project.

Reflections and Recommendations

This project not only reconnected children but also the staff across school. In a year, where staff have worked in bubbles and met up virtually to share information, this project allowed staff from different bubbles to work together, create videos and share their passion and expertise. The leadership model of having a main team to share ideas and communicate with sub teams was highly effective and will be used again for upcoming projects such as STEM. In order to enhance this project, I would look to involve cultural partners from outside of school. By developing the right partnerships the project would further improve outcomes for children. This will likely have additional costs to the project therefore I would look at the budget for this alongside embedded Arts and Culture projects in school such as Take One Picture and access additional funding if necessary.

