



Social Cohesion Project pupil report/ presentation

School context

Mount Pleasant Junior is a multi-cultural, inner city school. The pupils are from first, second and third generation immigrants mainly from the Asian sub-continent. The largest percentage is Pakistani, Bengali and Indian and in recent years from Somalia and Poland. We also have a smaller number of children from Iran, Iraq and Eastern Europe. The largest religious group in the school is Muslims and we have a smaller but significant number of Sikhs. Many of the children live in extended family groups and consequently experience a high degree of stability.

Kings Copse Primary School In Hedge End was paired with Mount Pleasant Junior. Kings Copse is predominantly a white, Christian school located in a growing suburb on the outskirts of Southampton. Although there are small pockets of deprivation, the social conditions are very different to that of Mount Pleasant.

Kings Copse is a smaller primary school with only one class in each year group. At the moment it is housed in a seventies Scola building that is currently being replaced with a new complex in the present school's grounds, to be opened this summer.

Mount Pleasant is a vast Victorian building, with high ceilings and spacious halls. It has large concrete playground and an all weather pitch, whereas Kings Copse has a 10 acre site of trees and fields.

For the project we involved all the children in year 6 from both schools so approximately 2 Mount Pleasant children were paired with one child from King's Copse. We did not want to single out a select group.

Of the 10 children from Mount Pleasant involved in the presentation, 8 are Muslims and 2 are Sikhs. Nine of the pupils were born in this country and one was born in Iraq but all have attended Mount Pleasant and its feeder school Maytree Infants. All are fluent in their family's mother tongue and most have had extended visits to the family's home country, either Pakistan, Bangladesh or India.

All ten children from Kings Copse involved in the presentation are of Christian denomination, although not all are practising Christians. Two of the children attend church regularly and one speaks English as an additional language.

Procedure

The focus of the research was looking at differences and similarities between Mount Pleasant children and the children of Kings Copse primary. The presentation follows the sequence of lessons and activities that explored the theme of differences that were covered in both schools:

- The original lesson when 5 key questions were introduced to the classes – the children give examples of their responses
- The schools exchanged photographs – the children enact their reaction to viewing their new friends

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- Kings Copse visited Mount Pleasant – the pupils remember their reactions to the building and the children. – Mount Pleasant pupils anticipate their arrival
- Discussions about the visit
- Mount Pleasant visit Kings Copse
- Discussion about the visit
- Rehearsing for the Conference
- The Conference

Findings

The presentations reveal the children's responses to the activities and each other. On both occasions that the classes met they felt the time was too short. Examples of the children's writing about the meetings are on display. It was an eye-opener for both sets of pupils, meeting children of different religions, culture and ethnicity. They showed a curiosity in each others' backgrounds, a feeling of allegiance with their own class and school and a defensive, protective attitude. Remarks were not racist or anti a particular religion but about individual personalities. If the comments were negative they tended to be about bad behaviour or language.

For both schools travelling to an unknown area was exciting but also involved a degree of trepidation. Some of the time on the visits the children spent comparing each others schools. They needed more opportunities to explore issues and to be relaxed enough to talk openly with one another.

The **biggest issues** facing both schools were:

- Time- the teachers met mainly after school in their own time to plan the activities together, discuss ideas, reflect on responses etc.
- The timing of the project – year 6 has a very pressured timetable and it has been difficult to timetable the extra activities at the same time as practise Sats and all the marking it involves.
- Finance – the children made contributions to the cost of the coaches. It was the main factor that prevented us meeting more often.

The **changes** we would make in the future are:

- The project would run in the Summer term after the national tests
- This would allow us to meet and explore issues over 6 weeks with all the visits pre-booked and time for follow up activities timetabled
- The visits would be for whole days and involve some sporting activities with mixed school teams.

Recommendations

The project is worthwhile and the two schools will continue their links in the next school year but in the summer term.

- Funding should be given to help cover the visits to each school
- Links between different communities are useful and desirable.
- Junior school pupils do not have such fixed views about others from a different background. Remarks were not racist or anti a particular religion but about individual personalities. If the comments were negative they tended to be about bad behaviour or language.
- It is useful for children to explore the similarities they have with their contemporaries from different backgrounds.
- It is very easy for pupils from different schools to see themselves as rivals, they need opportunities to share activities and experiences to enable friendships and respect to develop.

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Children's views:

I learned that it doesn't matter that you are different religions or different backgrounds you can make friends. (Aleena)

We got to learn that all people are not the same every person has their own looks and religion. (Nailah)

I enjoyed playing football with them because I wanted to see who was the best at football. (Ishaq)

I learned that meeting other people gives you the opportunity to tell them about what you like. (Mohammed)

I learnt that people in that area are similar to us because we both watch wrestling. (Zaheer)

I think it's worthwhile because we get to see new people and play with new people. I learnt how people's life is different. (Ismail)

I think it has been worthwhile meeting people very different from us. I think that it's important to meet and mix with people of different cultural backgrounds. Especially when you go up to secondary school because when you're there there will be thousands of children that are totally different to you and if you learn how to mix with different children when you're younger it's easier to mix with people when you're older. (Symran)

I learnt that it isn't nice to prejudge people. (Hope)

We may have differences but it doesn't mean we can't be friends. (Hope)

When I was back at school I felt safe and at home. (Matthew)

I had cracked from my shell and felt like myself but I did feel like an odd one out. (Sommer)

I did think my partner would be very different from me because she was Polish but it turns out we're just like twins! (Deanna)

People are different where I live because they fly in on a plane. (Charlotte)

I felt petrified and intimidated even though I knew what the teachers and my partner were like. I'd never felt so insecure. (Holly)

I think it was a good experience for later on in life because you will always meet different people in life. (Holly)