

Building Communities Through Dialogue Report Summary 2011 - 2014

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"There was one P4C class session where we were discussing something and one pupil, who was an elective mute, suddenly voiced her opinion ...the whole class was silent and listened to her and then they all clapped. It was so lovely, I nearly cried." (Teacher, Building Communities through Dialogue project school)

This quote brings to life some of the key aims of the Building Communities through Dialogue (BCtD) project, to improve pupils' social skills and self-esteem and give them the confidence to engage with groups of young people and especially those who are different from themselves.

Building Communities through Dialogue (BCtD) was a three-year project based in South Yorkshire schools, led by DECSY and supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. The focus of the project was the transition from primary to secondary school, where secondary schools had feeder primary schools with different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The intended outcome has been for young people to gain increased confidence and skills in speaking and listening and increased ability to communicate constructively and build trust with people from different backgrounds from their own.



PYRAMID ONE PRIMARY SCHOOLS JOINT YEAR 6 P4C SESSION

The idea for the project came from the work of the Schools Linking Network and the Oldham Linking project. The BCtD project was developed out of the experience of DECSY's pilot project 'Learning Together' which sought to develop cross-cultural relationships between children using Philosophy for Children (P4C). The BCtD project worked with three pyramids of schools, one secondary plus a number of its feeder primaries per year, with an extension into a fourth year to ensure the sustainability of the project in the first two pyramids of schools.

Summary

The aim of BCtD has been to provide children in the transition years of primary school, with the experience and ability to build trustful relationships with pupils from diverse backgrounds. By increasing familiarity with difference, the project has aimed to increase children's emotional, social and cognitive development, allowing them to work across and understand difference.

By focusing on the transition years of various primary schools (Y5, Y6) feeding into high school the project was intended to improve social inclusion and ease children's anxiety around transition, through relationship building. The activities of BCtD included establishing links between schools through a pen-pal system, co-operative games events and mutual visits based around P4C communities of enquiry. This was supported through training for teaching staff in P4C methods, allowing them to facilitate enquiries and create a unique space for children to voice their opinions and engage with wider issues of diversity, equality and identity. Through this method of learning, children have been able to develop their communication skills in listening and speaking, as well as their group-working abilities. The use of P4C can produce further impacts in individual academic development (as evidenced by the recent EEF study into the impact of P4C on disadvantaged children).

Overall, the project's success is seen through a number of positive outcomes such as a more cohesive school ethos, increasing the emotional and cognitive capacity of diverse children and an enhancement in teachers' continuing professional development, with support from DECSY as a regional expert centre in P4C.

Project Aims

- For children to build trustful relationships, in order to improve inclusion and cohesion within school communities
- To decrease the anxiety children feel about transition, by developing their confidence, communication skills and ability to work in groups
- To allow teachers the opportunity to add to their professional development by providing training in using enquiry based and dialogic learning.



Project Activities

- Pyramid partnerships (paired primary schools that feed into the same high school)
- Pupils paired as pen-pals getting to know each other through letter exchanges
- Co-operative games activities, held in a neutral space
- Communities of enquiry in the classroom, led by teachers allowing children space to voice their opinions
- Transition event at the secondary school with senior secondary pupils hosting and taking part in P4C enquiry around diversity
- Quantitative evaluation (completion of baseline questionnaires, comprising 56 questions - externally evaluated and analysed by the University of Sussex) and qualitative evaluation (focus groups and interviews carried out by the University of Brighton).

PICTURE LEFT : PYRAMID ONE - YEAR 6 PUPILS CO-OPERATIVE GAMES SESSION.

Outcomes/Impact

Children

The children enjoyed the process and experienced positive changes in their existing social outlook and behaviours. The data generated from the questionnaires evidenced positive gains in self-esteem, group working, multi-culturalism and decreased anxiety in working with new people. Overall, the children displayed more tolerant attitudes and showed increased empathy. Furthermore, children made important individual, academic gains in their speaking, listening and questioning skills.

"I think it's helped me to interact with children better as I wasn't good at it before",

"It has helped me to be more confident with different people and with people with different religions".

"It's like another person's ideas help to change your opinion and you see things differently."

School

Positive changes reflected in the data indicated improvements in social cohesion, leading to a reduction in exclusionary behaviour and smoother transitions overall. Employing a whole-school approach could lead to further gains.

Teachers

Teachers were able to gain P4C Level 1 accreditation, with the opportunity to progress towards Level 2. Teachers were supported by DECSY through training, resources and on-going support from expert staff. In terms of the classroom, teachers noticed considerable improvements in children's critical thinking through open questioning, and an overall greater confidence in learning independently. It also had a significant impact on teachers' professional practice:

"It's been biggest single thing that has changed how I teach and how I am. It's made me think more clearly about the way I work with the children."

The research in Year 2 found "a highly significant difference on teachers' confidence with respect to group work activities and P4C, with those in the intervention schools scoring substantially higher on confidence than those in the control schools, which points to the importance of teachers undergoing training in P4C and other areas of dialogic teaching and learning.

Parents

The project aimed to engage parents and carers in P4C enquiries to better appreciate the process and the aims of the project. This proved a challenge to organise in many of the schools involved in the project. In the few that did manage, the impact on parents was considerable.

Legacy

The first two pyramids of schools have committed to continuing the project processes, moving the target year to Year 5 and carrying on to Year 6, to allow more time for relationships to develop and less interruption to Year 6. The secondary schools are also trying to build on from transition with communities of enquiry in Year 7. A number of schools involved in the 'Learning Together' pilot scheme, have now signed up to become SAPERE 'Going for Gold' schools, working with DECSY to embed P4C across the curriculum.

For information related to the Building Communities through Dialogue project contact Clive Belgeonne: clive@decsy.org.uk



CO-OPERATIVE GAMES SESSION WITH TWO PYRAMID ONE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

"...we've taken one very small step towards helping the children understand that although there may be many differences between us, culturally, we are all the same in other ways."

"We can hold really in-depth discussions about work, about leveling work, about anything really, and the children can voice their opinions. But they do this in a very respectful way... they challenge each other in a really positive way. The way they can question each other now - it's amazing."

"I just wanted to say, a real valuable experience for both myself and kids, thoroughly enjoyed it, especially seeing kids contribute and grow in confidence. Look forward to attending the next session, hopefully encouraging more parents to attend."



PYRAMID THREE PRIMARY SCHOOLS JOINT P4C SESSION

Impact of the BCtD project: extracts from the external evaluations

BCtD was developed in one pyramid of schools (one secondary plus feeder primaries) per year, with preparation taking place with the next pyramid. The project managed to work with three pyramids of schools in total and was externally evaluated by researchers at Sussex and Brighton Universities, using both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Pupil impacts

All pupils were given a baseline and follow-up questionnaire (483 primary; 340 secondary) with Year 1 primary schools acting as the 'Intervention schools' and Year 2 primary schools as the 'Control schools'. From the 56 individual items in the baseline questionnaire, the researchers created 9 composite measures: Multiculturalism, Acculturation, Social Exclusion, Social Inclusion, School climate, Self-esteem, Group-working, Intergroup anxiety. The Year 1 end of year evaluation report found that 6 of the 9 measures showed a significant shift over time with the primary 'Intervention' schools, mostly in a 'positive' direction (i.e. more favourable from an intergroup relations perspective), and the Year 2 end of year evaluation report (when the primary pupils had less direct contact than Year 1) showed a positive shift in 5 out of 9 measures.

The Year 3 evaluation report noted that:

As was the case in the previous two years, we found moderate levels of stability in pupils' responses across the two time points, with those who scored relatively high on a given measure at the first time point continuing to score relatively high at the second time point.

In addition, we continued to observe a fascinating pattern of inter-correlations among the measures. For example, more open attitudes to cultural diversity (the 'multiculturalism' score) were correlated with more positive feelings of social inclusion, school climate, and attitudes to group work. Interestingly, anxiety about working in groups with those from other ethnic groups was significantly related less to general attitudes regarding other ethnic groups, and more to poorer school climate, negative attitudes to group work, and lower levels of social inclusion. The lead project researcher (Robin Banerjee) noted the positive impacts of the BCtD project pedagogy which has been "showing the positive links between overall school climate, attitudes towards group work, and openness to cultural diversity, and this may be helpful for underlining the point that group work can create and facilitate open attitudes towards dialogue, discussion, and consideration of multiple perspectives".

*"We now know that other people think differently and it's ok to think differently and others can listen to people's opinions."
Pupil's response to the project.*

The final evaluation report stated:

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data provides rich insights into the DECSY Building Communities through Dialogue project. The new cohort of pupils from the three primary schools involved in the final year of the project showed a broadly positive pattern of change over the course of the school year, both in terms of intergroup attitudes and more general feelings about themselves and about their schools.

PICTURE RIGHT :
PYRAMID 1 -
YEAR 6 PUPILS
CO-OPERATIVE
GAMES SESSION



Teachers

38 KS2 and 18 KS3 teachers received P4C training and support. The P4C training was seen as particularly beneficial. In Year 2 the researchers were able to make comparisons between the Pyramid 2 (Intervention) and Pyramid 3 (Control) teachers and they found "a highly significant difference on teachers' confidence with respect to group work activities and P4C, with those in the intervention schools scoring substantially higher on confidence than those in the control schools (mean scores out of 3 = 2.53 vs. 1.61, respectively)." This points to the importance of teachers undergoing training in P4C and other areas of dialogic teaching and learning.

Overall impact

The main intended outcome of the project "for young people to have increased confidence and skills in speaking and listening and increased ability to communicate constructively and build trust with people from different backgrounds from their own" was largely achieved, along with several of the subsidiary aims such as developing teachers' skills, building DECSY's capacity, raising the profile of dialogic teaching and learning related to diversity and transition, and disseminating results.

The aim of extending the approach beyond the initial three pyramids of schools proved elusive in the current educational climate during the funded period of the project. However, DECSY started working with a new network of schools from the Autumn Term 2015 as part of SAPERE's Going for Gold programme, which has the potential to spread the project learning further.