Case Study

Establishment name: Shakespeare Primary
Lancashire no. 02/016
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Award granted: Innovative Practice
Project title: 'Whole School Olympic Project'

Project summary

We planned a whole school project based around the Olympics to involve our parents in the children's learning. This followed on from a similar, very successful, project on the history of our town the previous year that won us a regional and national award given by PTA-UK for parental involvement.

We held 4, two hour 'Secret' meetings for the parents. At these meetings the parents planned and prepared all the costumes, music, banners, flags etc. for an opening ceremony just like the real Olympic Games. To launch the project in school the parents re-enacted an opening ceremony using the props they had prepared. The Olympic torch was lit and the work began with each class in school being given an Olympic nation to research. This involved aspects of history, geography, art, DT and the learning and recording of a song in the different countries' languages. These were compiled into a CD for parents to purchase.

The parents loved being involved with their children's work in school and after the initial launch came into classrooms to work alongside the children. The children's attention was grabbed by the hook of the opening ceremony and they were very enthusiastic about the whole project and the fact that parents were so interested in what they were doing in school. They had given up their time to create an exciting topic hook for them.

Specific aspect of practice to be accredited?
Parental involvement in school life and cross curricular theme.

Aspect of Every Child Matters addressed:
- Be healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

What were you hoping to achieve?
That parents of the children are able to show interest in their learning by having input into deciding WHAT their children will be learning; the children recognise this and therefore work harder because they know how important it is to their parents.
How did you identify the need for this practice?

After the initial success of a similar project that was carried out the year before - in order to make our children aware that their parents are interested and involved in their education - we decided to build on the enthusiasm of both the children and the parents and make this an annual event at our school. We are currently in the planning stage for 2013.

Briefly describe the main characteristics of the school

This is a two form entry school with many of our families facing economic challenges. With the fishing industry very much reduced we have a high rate of unemployment in the area. Our children are mostly white British with small percentage of children who have English as second language. We have a high number of SEN children on roll.

What did you do?

- We invited parents - by flyering and facebook postings - to a series of 'secret' evening meetings (providing refreshments and a crèche for those who needed childcare in order to attend).
- With the Olympics chosen as a topical theme, the countries involved were discussed and one chosen for each class. The parents and staff then worked together at these meetings to design and make costumes, paint large scale banners and flags, work out how to recreate the Olympic torch to meet health and safety requirements, collect suitable music to play at the ceremony and planned how this ceremony would be carried out.
- Participant parents were each assigned specific roles.
- A password-protected page was created on the website for parents to comment on their involvement and to post photos of the making evenings. The password was shared with the children at the opening ceremony so all in the school community could post on the blog.
- The ceremony was performed in the school hall in front of the children with representatives from each country marching around the hall dressed in national costume, carrying flags and banners and accompanied by the national anthems. A parent who had represented Britain ran with the torch and the ceremony culminated in the lighting of the Olympic flame which an ingenious parent had designed using light material and fans. The head boy and girl spoke the Olympic Oath.
- The flags and banners were then presented to each class so that they knew which area of research they were involved in.
- The work in school lasted three weeks with classes researching the history and geography of the designated country. There was also food tasting, cooking and several art and DT projects going on. Each class learned a song in the language of their country and we employed a professional recording company to compile a CD, which we then sold to the parents as a memento of this project.
- ICT pupil experts were designated as camera men for the length of the project and recorded the activities in the classrooms.
Parents, grandparents and friends volunteered throughout the 3 weeks at family 'making' sessions and came in to speak about their experiences of visiting/living in different countries. The parents involved were as enthusiastic about this project as they had been about the previous one, and parental involvement was high. We believe the benefits of this type of work for our whole community are immense and intend to carry out a similar project annually.

Which members of the establishment and/or wider community have been involved and what was their role?

- Mrs Laura Willan/Mrs Susan Bartlett - organisers.
- Mrs Helen Bielec, MFL coordinator, who provided information to staff regarding countries researched.
- All staff in school who planned and delivered the project and became involved with the initial making process.
- Many of our wonderful parents who gave up much of their time to plan and prepare the initial launch and then became involved in ongoing work within school.

How has the progress of the project been monitored and evaluated?

We have monitored both this project and the previous one through ongoing blogs on the school website. We have also carried out informal discussions with all involved and completed questionnaires. Parental and child feedback has been so overwhelmingly positive that we are committed to continuing this work for the foreseeable future. The success of the previous projects is measured by how keen the parents are to be involved again. It has also been successful in interesting parents in other areas of school life such as accompanying children on school visits, helping in school on a voluntary basis and coming into school to take part in family making days.

How has the practice been modified or improved during development?

As this is the second time we organised the family-led whole school topic, slight modifications had already been made. We decided to stick to what had been a successful format.

What has been the impact of the project on pupils’ learning, achievement or enjoyment and how has this been measured?

Children were very enthusiastic about the project because they had been so excited by the initial launch. The parents were proud to have had such an impact on their children’s learning. The enjoyment experienced by the children is clear to see in photographs and the work they produced and the measure of how much the parents gained from it is the fact that they are keen to be involved in the next project. We have found through discussion with both parents and pupils that there is more discussion going on at home about what the children are actually doing in school.
What are the next stages in the development process?

The 2013 project is now in the planning stage and parents will once again be invited to a series of secret workshops early in the Spring term before the project is launched to the school.

What aspects of this practice may be useful for other establishments to consider?

This has proved invaluable in strengthening links between home and school and has been very motivational for the children.

Any other comments:

Please see the school website to see how much both this project and the previous project have been enjoyed by our whole school community.