

Case Story Description: The World Café

<p>Short description of the challenge that the tool was used to tackle</p>	<p>The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in the school decided to use the World Cafe tool (Stress Management theme) to facilitate discussion around a potentially contentious issue relating to the school timetable. The SLT felt that this tool would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) encourage staff to look at this particular issue with ‘fresh eyes’ b) provide an opportunity for all staff to feel ‘listened to’ c) provide a way of helping staff to see this issue from a variety of perspectives d) provide a structure to the discussion that would enable the staff to come to a conclusion e) ensure that, as all staff had contributed to the discussion and decision making process, that they would have some ownership of the decisions made and would consequently have some ‘buy-in’ into making it work
<p>Contextual information</p>	<p>The issue being discussed through the World Cafe tool was specific to this particular school but the importance of collaboration (valuing a large staff’s views and opportunities for focused discussion) is relevant to all schools and had been identified in the RETAIN questionnaire.</p> <p>Retention is an on-going issue for UK schools. Whilst Exwick Heights Primary was fortunate to have had a stable staff for many years, the school had noticed a significant decline in the number of teachers applying for vacant positions and so wanted to get a better understanding of the key factors influencing teacher retention.</p>
<p>Title of the tool</p>	<p>World Cafe</p>
<p>How did the school work with the tool</p>	<p>The SLT used the World Cafe tool to explore a key issue with all of the teaching staff, namely whether the school should continue to have: 2 x one hour lessons then a breaktime then 1 x one hour lesson, or 1 x one and a half hour lesson, then break, 1x one and a half hour lesson</p> <p>This issue had become quite contentious for the teachers and it needed to be resolved. The SLT already knew that colleagues would have quite strong and differing opinions on this. Four teachers were known to be very reluctant to alter their timetable, and presented good reasons for this. Others felt that the change could be beneficial for both staff and pupils. The SLT felt that the World Cafe tool would effectively enable all teaching staff to have a voice regarding the proposed changes in a manageable way, without one person or viewpoint dominating.</p> <p>The tool was trialled during a staff INSET meeting (1.5 hrs). All teaching staff (25 teachers) participated.</p>
<p>Promoting factors</p>	<p>The tool enabled teachers to understand why their colleagues may find some proposed changes difficult, and allowed them to find a compromise which recognised all viewpoints.</p> <p>The tool enabled involvement of all staff in reaching a consensus. Their conclusion was to implement a provisional staggered break time for the initial term for older classes to support the transition from lower classes, who have a different timetable.</p>

	Staff readily engaged with this approach. Caroline (Deputy Head-teacher) reported that while staff are often tired at the end of INSET meetings (5pm), during this meeting there was an energy that was evident, with staff on task and smiling throughout!
Barriers	<p>Time and repetition! The World Café did allow everyone to speak, but some groups were far quicker at sharing thoughts than others, meaning that the rotations were often delayed. As the session progressed, less time was required by each group as the answers to some questions had already been shared. As a result, the SLT reduced discussion time as the session progressed, encouraging the more thoughtful, articulate groups to summarise thoughts!</p> <p>Some other difficulties encountered resulted from group dynamics. In future it may be better to place teachers into groups rather than allow them to choose their own groups.</p>
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