

→ Review and Reflection

The brief created by Walsall Public Health stated that the resources should be co-produced by children.

We have taken the key principles underpinning co-production as described by the New Economics Foundation and Action for Children³ to reflect on how the Team developed and created the Love your Feelings resources.

“The fact that they (the children) were listened to, and have learned to listen to each other, is truly remarkable.”

MY
WELL BEING
♥ your feelings

Review and Reflection

Photography: Ming de Nasty



Valuing children, the skills, knowledge and experiences they bring

Co-production has an emphasis on doing things with children rather than for children. In Love your feelings this principle was key in the way the resources were created, and in how the final resources are used by teachers to help their students understand their emotions and build their emotional resilience.

Children were told right from the start that they were involved as creators of a brand-new set of games, and that their ideas and comments would be listened to very seriously.

For example, initially the Team was keen to use the Five Ways to Wellbeing messages to help explain emotional wellbeing to children. The children refined the Five Ways message to a set of three coping strategies they found easier to understand:

- **SHARE** (your feelings, your time – your ears!)
- **TAKE NOTICE** (of other people's feelings as well as your own, and be mindful)
- **DO STUFF!** (keep learning and be active).

Teacher Alex Harris talked about his children after their involvement in the programme. “The fact that they (the children) were listened to, and have learned to listen to each other, is truly remarkable.”

Asset-based approaches have been identified as a key to successfully engaging children in identifying solutions. ‘Love your feelings’ builds on the creative interests children already have. Children used drama, visual art and creative writing to explore the three key wellbeing messages.

As part of the process to develop the resources children have created films to show how they used the arts to help them share and manage their emotions. The final resource encourages teachers to use the films to support their children to do the same. Aked and Stephens (2009⁴) refer to this as creating space to enable children to ‘be the change’ by focusing on children as part of their own solution.

Valuing teachers and health professionals' skills, knowledge and experiences

A definition of production is to make something, adding the ‘co’ means that whatever is made is created together. Health professionals informed the content and teachers the way the resources were to be delivered. It was very important that representatives from both groups were involved.

One of the early challenges was establishing a steering group of teachers and health professionals to help shape the development of the resources. This proved challenging mainly due to people's lack of capacity to attend meetings. It was decided to explore other more effective ways of engaging and involving people.

Teachers from the four pilot schools were involved in practical decisions about form and function of the resources. For example, whilst the resource had a strong, coloured branding, the design team had to ensure materials would look just as good printed without colour as teachers said they often can only print out in black and white.

There were also discussions about how best to support teachers to deliver the resources, resulting in a short ‘how to’ film rather than a lengthy, written instruction sheet being included as part of the online resources.

The team felt it was also important to value the creative assets of teachers who were going to deliver the resources and teachers are encouraged to use their own creative interests to promote wellbeing. Opportunities to make cross-curriculum links are also supported. For example one of the teachers involved in the pilot used his love of poetry to encourage his children to start to talk and share their emotions.

The creative team was responsible for ensuring the final resources were fit for purpose and of high quality. The film company and graphic design team spent time with the children understanding how they played the story game and with teachers to understand how they explained the ideas to their children. This enabled teachers and children to be involved in creative decisions and valued the skill and expertise of the arts team. →

^{3&4} NEF and Action for Children (Aked and Stephens 2009)

Successes, Challenges and Key Learning

Photography: Ming de Nasty



Successes

- Having a strong, adaptable arts idea meant that children could participate in a meaningful way to develop the resources.
- The pilot has shown that the resources are easy to use by class room teachers. "I found it very easy to access resources from the website as everything I needed was there."
- creative framework to enable teachers to support children to talk about their emotions, to listen to others and share their feelings.
- Teachers at Christ Church have become champions and advocates for the resource leading workshops at regional and local professional development events.
- In all of the workshops where children and/or teachers ran the Story Path game, children talked openly and positively about how good it had felt to share their feelings, in particular how much they appreciated being listened to: "It's the notice of what I was saying! Even when I came in with exciting news about my Mom nobody listened! I think this is a really good start now."

Challenges

- The team aspired to involve a wider group of health and educational professionals in a steering group. This proved challenging mainly due to people's capacity to attend involving people.
- Identifying primary schools who were willing to participate in the arts programme was also a challenge. Schools had to invest time to develop a new concern about their capacity to do this.
- and the Arts Team worked with whole classes to develop the resources. Working with smaller groups of pupils to develop elements of the resources would have for those children. Participatory arts activities enabled children to be engaged on the resources.

Key Learning

- The concept of co-production is normally used to involve and engage children in creating a service. We learnt that by using the key principles involved in co-production we could develop a set of resources which teachers can use to engage and involve children in developing their own strategies to support their emotional wellbeing.
- We initially had hoped to encourage schools to involve children in delivering Children would be introduced to the resources in Year 4 by Year 5 children. In turn when they moved to Year 5 they would work with year 4 children and so on. This would enable children to become a participant and a facilitator, in co-production terms a recipient and a provider of a service. Some of the schools involved in the pilot stage felt this could deter teachers from using the resources, mainly because it would create logistical problems in terms of timetables etc. It is however strongly recommended in the teaching guide that the 'Love your Feelings' resources are used as a facilitation tool in a school's buddying/mentoring process.
- We found creative ways of supporting children to introduce the resources to other children. Children from Christ was also used to create a short advert for the resources.