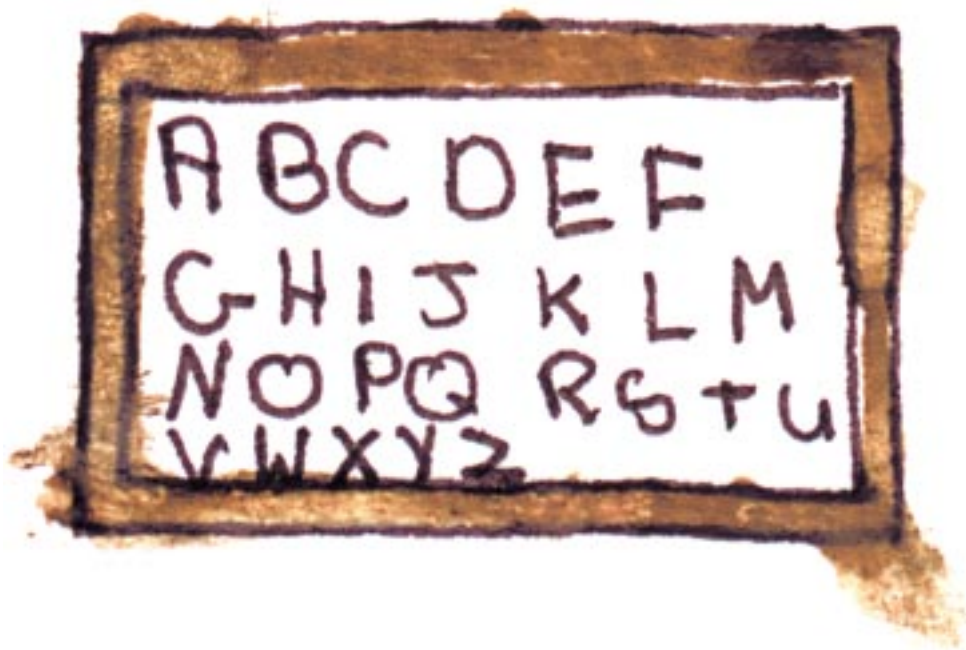


4 PROMOTING A LEARNING ORGANISATION CULTURE IN SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITY



Through the Bridging the Gap project, the university engages in a learning partnership with schools, which promotes a learning organisation culture in both the schools and university.

A key distinguishing feature of the Bridging the Gap project is the close collaboration between schools and the university. Through the project, the university has engaged in close collaboration with schools and their communities to promote educational inclusion. In doing so, the project has also fostered the development of a learning organisation culture in both schools and the university.

There is a general consensus, supported by some research evidence, that teachers derive benefit from professional development that is linked with the classroom setting. Within the Bridging the Gap Bridging the Gap Project, teachers, principals, parents, university staff and members

of the project team are all co-learners, and the case studies in this section illustrate how this is changing the learning experiences of pupils in the project schools.

Teachers in these schools have broadened and deepened their skills in specific curriculum areas, such as language development, science, drama, maths and music. They have learned how to integrate new technologies in the classroom. They have also found new ways of handling the extremely challenging behaviour of some of their pupils, so that a more positive learning environment is created in the school. In many of the project schools, teachers and parents have worked closely together in the classroom to promote active and fun approaches to learning.

CASE STUDY 4.1

LEARNING TO WORK IN A CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT

YOUTH ENCOUNTER SCHOOL, INFIRMARY ROAD

Bridging the Gap funding was used to run a training programme in anger management for students of the Youth Encounter Project (YEP). The entire cohort of 27 students attending the school took part in the programme. The majority of staff were involved in running the anger management programme with the students. This included the Principal, three class-based teachers, the resource teacher, the school counsellor, the community worker, the Bean an Tí, four special needs assistants, the secretary and two youth workers.

PROJECT GOALS

The main goal of our project was to increase levels of positive behaviour in the students attending the YEP. For students this meant exploring their personal management of anger through a training programme in the skills necessary for dealing with angry/aggressive situations. Through this intervention a concurrent goal was to reduce the amount of verbal abuse by students towards staff and each other. A reduction in verbal abuse and aggressive behaviour would enable a more positive relationship between pupils and the school.

The goal for staff was to facilitate less aggressive behaviour in the students by teaching and modelling non-aggressive, positive behaviour and encouraging and rewarding students who made an effort to manage their anger. Our aim was to explore how adults react in situations of aggressive behaviour by students in order to increase staff awareness of the role staff play in their interactions with students.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The intervention was based on providing the students with a seven-month programme on anger management training.

The programme consisted of

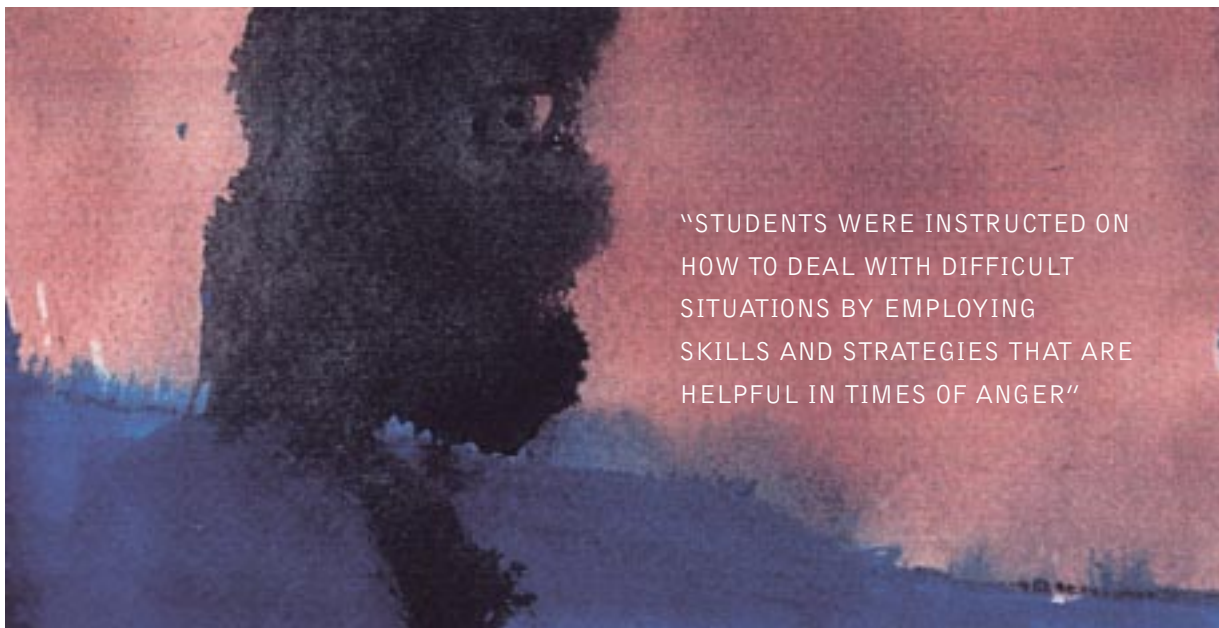
- A one-hour weekly group work session, facilitated by the class teacher, resource teacher or counsellor, on the exploration of feelings and how to deal with anger
- A whole-school approach to reinforcing, acknowledging and praising an improvement in behaviour as a result of the training
- A weekly meeting of staff involved in the training to discuss and plan progress
- An art / creative writing competition for all students to encourage a positive relationship with the school.

DATA COLLECTED

Records were kept during the period of training which enabled us to monitor the reduction, if any, of verbal abuse by students towards staff or each other. At the same time a record of positive behaviour was kept weekly for each student to award 'bonus-points' for good work and positive interactions during the school day. A number of class based rewards schemes were run during the programme. These schemes acknowledged and reaffirmed the students when they put into practice the skills learnt during the training. Feedback was obtained from staff and students to measure the impact of the training and how students reacted to a whole school approach to dealing with verbal abuse and angry outbursts.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

The anger management programme provided both students and staff a focused and constructive way to look at issues around dealing with aggressive situations. The weekly staff meeting allowed for a team approach in dealing with the issues arising. Staff members have acknowledged as positive the opportunity to share information, ideas and experiences around this topic. A regular meeting served as a good support for staff, in



terms of delivering the programme but also as a moral support for working in a complex and fraught environment. Staff members were able to contribute in a more personal way, perhaps in a way that otherwise may be outside their daily 'role'. The experience of having productive, co-operative and focused staff meetings can be replicated in other areas of work in the YEP.

Implementing a behaviour modification programme allowed staff to look at our role as models of 'good' behaviour for the students. With a whole school approach it was crucial for all the staff to give good example of the skills and behaviour that we were trying to foster in the students. The programme encouraged discussion about the importance of meaningful positive affirmation of our students. There is now a greater awareness amongst staff of the importance of praising good behaviour encouraging students to deal with others in a respectful manner. Our records and the anecdotal evidence shows that the

programme did have a positive impact on the students of the YEP. Dealing with anger in an explosive way is a typical behaviour for our students. The programme allowed for students to look at positive, non-violent, constructive alternatives to aggression. The weekly group-work sessions allowed for discussions around feelings, how to recognise them and how to deal with them. The sessions provided an opportunity to explore situations when the students get angry and how they might better cope with these situations. Students were instructed on how to deal with difficult situations by employing skills and strategies that are helpful in times of anger. These skills were modelled by staff to give example to the students of how to appropriately use the skills. The impact of the training in the group-work became obvious over time around the school when students were observed to be managing their anger better and employing the skills learnt to interact with others in a more positive and calm way.

The art/creative writing competition allowed students to express themselves about school in a more creative way. Both students and staff alike have commented on the positive impact of the colourful artwork around the school. The display of artwork, stories and poems have given students a sense of ownership about their school and this competition has been a great success. The various reward systems, including an overnight trip, have helped the students to aspire to more positive behaviour. Tangible rewards, backed up by praise and encouragement, allows the student to 'feel good' about behaving well while discouraging negative aggressive actions.

The involvement of all the staff was very important in this programme. A whole-school approach to aggressive behaviour has had very positive effects. While improvement in this area is very difficult to measure, the overall progress of a number of individual students over time is a good indication of the effectiveness of this programme. A number of students who had formerly exhibited extremely challenging and violent behaviour have learned better ways of dealing with their anger, and they themselves are now much more calm, articulate and able to talk about how they have changed. Much of the change has to do with staff and student awareness around what is happening when a child is angry.

The work on social skills and on the personal management of anger has been very fruitful. More and more students are seen to use the skills learnt in class in everyday situations. Behind tough exteriors the young people want to change the way they respond when they are angry. Most of our students have difficulty in re-establishing communication with others – particularly adults - when

they have done wrong. It is an ongoing struggle to work with this but we have had very positive results over time.

OUR OWN EVALUATION

The evaluation of our work on this programme can be broken into two areas: changes in student behaviour and changes in the attitude of staff. One of the issues that has come up in staff feedback on the programme is the growing staff awareness around how we are as a child gets angry in a school setting. It is never easy to stay calm in ourselves. It is very easy to tell ourselves to stay calm and not to be "sucked in" as a child gets angry. It is another matter entirely at the exact moment when a child is seriously angry and we are personally threatened or perceive ourselves, or others, to be in danger. It can also happen that we can unwittingly be the triggers that provoke an aggressive response from our students. Sometimes too many staff – including the Principal - get involved in trying to resolve difficult situations. This can lead to more confusion and greater levels of noise, which can provoke increased aggression in students. We are aware that more work needs to be done with staff in this regard.

This whole programme needed a staff that was brave enough to look at how to manage better in difficult situations. I believe this was the case in the Youth Encounter School. The greatest shift that I have seen is in the willingness of staff to look more and more to themselves and their own behaviour in response to student aggression. We still have a long journey to travel. It is a huge challenge to explore new ways of dealing with difficult behaviour in young people. More and more staff are seeing that sanctions are not the only way to help young people learn from their behaviour. We believe that the greatest benefit of the programme was that much of what we set out to do is now integrated into our way of working with our students. Long may the process continue.

CASE STUDY 4.2

BECOMING A LEARNING ORGANISATION IN COLLABORATION WITH THE UNIVERSITY

SCOIL AN SPIORAID NAOIMH, BISHOPSTOWN

Our project for the school year 2003-4 was on science. We chose science because it was being introduced to schools as part of the revised curriculum. The project was broken into four subsections. Two third classes and two fifth classes (a total of 88 pupils) participated in the project. The teachers chose a science topic for their class because of their own personal interest and also to complement the science curriculum.

The topics chosen were:

- Garden Birds
- Sound
- Hydraulics
- Fungi.

PROJECT GOALS

Pupil related goals:

- co-operative learning
- conducting surveys
- organising a rota
- to gain in terms of skills, concepts and knowledge
- acquiring a scientific knowledge appropriate to age group
- arousing curiosity about what is happening in the dark quiet corners of nature
- developing an active sense of enquiry
- developing a strong sense of teamwork through the discovery process, practice and performance
- To gain in terms of attitude, self esteem, interaction with peers/teachers, communication skills, increase in vocabulary, mastery of objectives

Teacher related Goals:

- Integration of science, art and maths
- Promotion of independent learning
- Integration of computer skills

- Developing interaction with outside agencies/ organisations
- Enhancing best practice and classroom management

Parent and family related goals:

- Building on positive relations with parents
- promoting increased family support

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

We invited people from UCC with expertise in the topics that we were studying to visit us and share their knowledge. Experts from the Departments of Ecology, Zoology and Plant Science, the Departments of Physics, the National Micro Electronic Centre, the Departments of Hydraulics & Maritime Research and the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering visited the school and shared their knowledge.

We invited an authority on bird life to visit the school to enthuse the pupils and to give direction to the project. We introduced the children to correct scientific terminology, and we did art work specific to the area being studied.

We went on field trips to:

- Inniscarra Dam, courtesy of the ESB and Cork County Council
- The National Micro Electronic Research Centre
- Departments of Ecology, Zoology & Plant Science, UCC.

In the hydraulics project, we explored:

- water pressure
- effects of air pressure on water
- gravity flow
- surface tension
- the water turbine
- the effect of pipe sizing

“WE INVITED AN AUTHORITY ON BIRD LIFE TO VISIT THE SCHOOL TO ENTHUSE THE PUPILS AND TO GIVE DIRECTION TO THE PROJECT. WE INTRODUCED THE CHILDREN TO CORRECT SCIENTIFIC TERMINOLOGY, AND WE DID ART WORK SPECIFIC TO THE AREA BEING STUDIED”



- How the siphon works
- How waves are made.

In the fungi project,

- We exhibited examples of fungi/moulds
- We did experiments on spore prints and with yeast
- We observed moulds growing, located and identified lichens
- We developed quizzes around topics being studied.

In the garden birds project, we:

- Observed bird life in the school grounds and at home
- Learned to identify different types of garden birds
- Created graphs on bird population
- Made clay models of birds

In the sound project, we:

- Investigated the relationship between vibration and sound
- Developed on the concept of pitch and volume
- Examined various types of stringed instruments and then designed and made our own instruments
- We made a set of tubular bells after exploring the concept that pitch is related to length
- We developed water instruments using glasses and bottles
- We made simple percussion instruments.

DATA COLLECTED

1. Formal testing at the beginning and end of project to assess the pupils' level of knowledge
2. Formal and informal testing at the end of the project to assess the levels of knowledge acquired/enhanced
3. Acquired knowledge was also assessed through discussion and quizzes
4. Informal assessment took place before the project began to decide on levels of musical skill of the children, childrens' musical performance after the project is testament to what they have achieved
5. Brainstorming sessions were held before the project began and immediately after the project to elicit levels of knowledge
6. Flow charts were developed to track the project
7. Mapping was done before and after the project
8. Data were collected informally through teacher observation, self- assessment and comments from parents
9. Activities were recorded using the digital camera and digital video recorder.
10. Reports were written on various aspects of the projects.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

1. The projects resulted in increased enthusiasm from the children
2. Increased interest in matters scientific to the extent that a greater number of children would rate science as their favourite subject
3. Increased family involvement as many parents participated in experiments with their children at home
4. Project contributed to professional development of school team
5. Children learned to relate to each other through activity
6. Projects gave children with skills and interest in matters scientific an opportunity to shine
7. Children learned to persist at experiments until a successful outcome was achieved
8. Children learned to work as a team
9. Children have become enthusiastic for more scientific activities
10. Parents appreciated the work that was involved and the outcome of the efforts
11. Full integration of many subjects

12. Increased self-esteem as a direct result of participation in project
13. Teachers gained by advancing their own knowledge in their chosen topics.
14. Teachers were also empowered by allowing them to take the initiative to direct their particular topic.
15. Teachers also benefited as a result of their interaction with professionals from other areas of education and industry.

OUR OWN EVALUATION

The best thing about the project was how infectious it became. Children thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of the project and participation in the project extended beyond the classroom. One of the more important aspects of the project was how the wider community was willing to participate. Observing the enthusiasm and excitement of the children was a joy to behold. The project facilitated the full integration of many subjects. Pupil self-esteem was greatly enhanced through participation in projects.



“ONE OF THE MORE IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT WAS HOW THE WIDER COMMUNITY WAS WILLING TO PARTICIPATE.”

CASE STUDY 4.3

LEADERSHIP OF LEARNING ORGANISATION

SUNDAY'S WELL BOYS' SCHOOL

Our project was divided into two sections:

Language development and communication through drama and role-play

This was our third year with this project and this year we included Junior Infants. A total of 80 pupils and four teachers were involved.

Developing IT skills

Our aim was to get the children in sixth class to be able to use a digital camera, to be able to unload to a computer, crop, resize and print the pictures as well as learning to use a digital video camera.

PROJECT GOALS

Pupil related goals:

- We set out to develop pupils' communications skills in a positive manner. Our main aim was to enhance self-esteem and to enable the children to express themselves clearly and distinctly and to interact with their peers.
- In IT, our aim was to enable the pupils to look at technology in a way that does not involve games and to be able to enjoy their learning experience.

Teacher related goals.

Teachers in all classes aimed to ensure that learning can be fun, that it has practical uses and that we benefit from being able to interact, cooperate and express our feelings, fears and emotions.

Goals related to parents and families.

Over the past number of years we have found that the parents find it easier to interact with the school and the staff in relation to non-core related subjects. They find it easier to discuss a child being shy, having poor pronunciation or an inability to mix rather than discussing

his problems with English or Maths. At times when the children are involved in drama, the parents will always be delighted to become involved.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

While our original language development project was targeted at the younger half of the school, 'Bridging the Gap' has afforded us an opportunity to develop in a number of different ways and to involve a larger group of pupils.

Two staff members have attended the IT training during the year. Through sharing information this has had an impact on other staff members as well.

Two staff members attended Harvard last summer. The Principal was sponsored by UCC, the other teacher by the Board of Management of the school. Teachers also attended other professional development events provided by Bridging the Gap.

A number of parents attended the Bullying Seminar, which was organised through the Home School Community Liaison Programme.

Drama Group.

A visiting drama teacher works with junior classes, and brings a new perspective to drama in the school. She introduces acting exercises, theatre games, improvisation, playmaking and performance. This encourages self awareness and awareness of others. The pupils are encouraged to become more expressive in a verbal and non-verbal manner and they are given the opportunity to work as members of a creative group as individuals, in pairs, in small and large groups.

IT Group.

The pupils learned how to set up, focus and take photos, and the art of selecting, cropping and manipulating the photographs. All pupils were involved in taking and producing individual photographs which were displayed in the church for their Confirmation. This learning process led to a number of teachers having to update their skills in order to keep up with the "whiz kids".

DATA COLLECTED

Attendance

Increase in average attendance on the day of drama classes, from 91% to 94.6%. The motivation of this method of learning encourages a better attendance even among the younger pupils.

Literacy

The overall standard of literacy among the pupils, especially in oral language has improved in the past couple of years. The children are more confident and better able to express themselves. This has led to a reduction in the number of incidents among pupils, as they have learned to work together to resolve difficulties in everyday life. This creates a better atmosphere for everybody in the school.

The response of parents and staff.

The parents and class teachers of the pupils involved have agreed that the project has enhanced the self-esteem of the pupils, has enriched their language experience, it has allowed them to experiment with different language, foster their creativity and improve their problem solving skills.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

Bridging the Gap has had a very positive impact on our school. We had spent some time discussing language development and the project was the catalyst to set us in

motion and give us the impetus to develop. However it is the other developments that have arisen from the project which were unplanned that are most impressive.

Pupils

It has been particularly noticeable that there is less friction and animosity among pupils as they have learned to express their feelings and developed listening skills. This has improved the quality of school life for all. The drama programme has had a significant impact on motivation, on learning and on the development of pupils' characters.

Parents

This project has given a number of parents an opportunity to become involved in the 'nice' side of school. For many parents, the word 'homework' is enough to raise tension and create an atmosphere of stress in the home. However having to learn their lines in drama and the technique of expression of the character is seen as pleasant work. For all the parents it has been a wonderful experience to watch their children take part in different drama and role-play situations. Having surveyed the parents of all of the children involved we were surprised that almost 70% completed the questionnaire they received. Their response was very positive and they had an excellent opportunity to share in their children's development.

Teachers

All of the teachers involved are totally in favour of continuing the programme and trying to extend it to other classes. The general consensus is that it "gave the children a rich oral language experience, it fostered their creativity, encouraged group work and problem solving."



“PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT HAS INCREASED AND THE POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE IN THE SCHOOL HAS HELPED TO CREATE A PLEASANT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT”

Principal

As principal I had an opportunity of a lifetime to attend the Project Zero summer school in Harvard last year. UCC and Bridging the Gap has given our schools the opportunity to target a variety of projects for the benefit of the pupils in our care. The needs of schools vary depending on past traditions and the expertise of people on the different staffs. In IT in particular it has given me an opportunity to develop my computer skills in the areas that are important to me as principal.

OUR OWN EVALUATION

Having introduced an IT aspect this year has made us as teachers upgrade our own skills. It introduced a new learning curve for the school as a whole, which we would like to develop further next year. Having changed some of the staff to different standards it has created an opportunity whereby all teachers have now been involved in the project. It has led to an awareness of the need to develop our own teaching skills to meet the needs of the pupils we serve. Parental involvement has increased and the positive atmosphere in the school has helped to create a pleasant learning environment.

CASE STUDY 4.4

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

NORTH PRESENTATION PRIMARY SCHOOL, GERARD GRIFFIN ST

Our project focused on Local History incorporating Information Technology. It involved pupils in our 3rd and 5th classes, 43 in all. Their class teachers collaborated with other staff members, including Home-School Links Teacher; IT Co-ordinator; SESE Co-ordinator; Principal; Art & Crafts teacher and Special Needs Assistant. Parents & Grandparents and members of Local Community were also involved.

PROJECT GOALS

Pupil Related Goals

- To heighten the children's awareness and interest in their local history and culture by making it as enjoyable and active as possible.
- To involve the families of the children and members of the local community actively in the learning process.
- To increase the children's knowledge of local history.
- To increase the children's and their parents' awareness of the value of IT in learning from using the Internet as a source of information to using IT skills in presenting information in text and image format.
- To increase the competence and confidence of the children in the use of language through practising their presentation skills.
- To incorporate the Visual Arts in the children's learning with a view to developing Multiple Intelligences.

Teacher Related Goals

- To promote the use of a digital camcorder as a learning tool.
- To train Staff members in the use of the camcorder and the rudiments of video editing.
- To promote teamwork within the Staff.
- To promote the use of the Internet as a learning tool.
- To promote integration and cross-curricular learning.
- To promote the use of the children's local environment in their education

Parent Related Goals

- To foster an awareness and a knowledge of local history and culture among parents and grandparents.
- To involve families directly in their children's education.
- To show parents how much they could contribute to their children's learning.
- To further open the school to the local community.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Preparatory Work

At initial meetings of the teachers involved in the project, it was decided that in order to involve all pupils and particularly less able children, Art & Craft, Drama and Games would be an integral part of the project. The project began with a field trip to an Archaeological Dig on the Viking Site on South Main St. The pupils had the opportunity to see history at first hand and they also heard a talk on Cork history given by a lecturer from the UCC History Department. This led the children back to looking at the history of their own local area.

Field trips

Historical field trips then took place to Shandon Church, Northside Folklore Centre, and the Cork Butter Market. The pupils devised a questionnaire and completed it with their parents and some grandparents. From these they learned lots of interesting information about school days long ago in North Pres. We then invited a number of grandparents and members of the local community to talk to the classes about their school days. The event was very successful. The children were really proud to have their grandparents in the class and for the grandparents it was their first time back in class. Sadly it appeared that a lot of memories were quite negative.

The children studied old roll books and registers and were really fascinated at their discoveries. For example the

naming of parents' occupations in the Clárleabhar led to much research on jobs now gone, some specifically related to the Butter Market. The girls used their Maths skills to list and graph these.

GAA Club

The two class teachers involved in the project began a GAA club after school. The pupils had learned a little about the local Glen Club at the Folklore Centre and are trying to emulate their heroes in learning Gaelic Football.

Drama Club

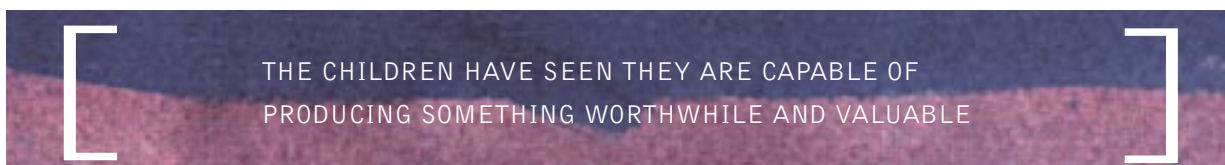
The learning Support Teacher began a weekly lunchtime Drama Club and the girls have worked on depicting what they have learned in local history through Creative Dance.

Filming The Project

When we undertook the project we decided that an integral part of it would be the purchasing of a Digital Camcorder to make a film of the process. To our surprise 50% of the staff declared an interest and undertook a training course funded by the Cork Teachers' Centre. The tutor was an inspiration and rather than focussing purely on the project, infused all with the potential the camcorder presents in the school setting. Our first tiny 2-minute production was, eventually after many failed attempts, a great team success. A spin off of the project has been the interest of the staff in the camcorder and its use around the school.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

- The project has had a very positive effect on teamwork among the Staff. It has broadened out from the initial people involved and many more came on board during the year to help out. We were reminded what it was like to be on the other end of the learning process. We were also reminded that learning is a lot easier when it is fun.
- The children have accumulated knowledge about their local area and the knowledge of how to find and process information.
- Through the Music Concert our 5th and 6th classes have been to UCC. George Boole's background told them that it's not only rich people's children who can end up as professors in UCC!
- The school has been further opened to the local community, parents and grandparents have been welcomed into the school and involved in the learning process.
- Teachers have added to their IT skills in learning digital video editing and have used the internet as a valuable resource in children's learning.
- The children have added to their IT skills in presentation and have seen the value of the Internet.
- The confidence of the children has increased through the use of Creative Dance and using the camcorder to allow them to improve their presentation skills. The children have seen that they are capable of producing something worthwhile and valuable.
- The school has acquired the technology and the expertise to use video editing as an educational tool.
- The school will now have a local history film, which can be used in the education of future pupils.



CASE STUDY 4.5

TEACHERS AND PUPILS LEARNING TOGETHER

NORTH PRESENTATION SECONDARY SCHOOL, FARRANREE

This project involved all 1st years (72 students) and all 2nd Years (60 students) for half a year each. Six teachers were involved in: Music, Drama, Art, Dance, Computers and Design

PROJECT GOALS

Pupil related goals

To improve school retention levels by

- enhancing motivation of pupils through the arts: music, art, drama and dance
- engaging pupils in active learning
- enhancing pupils' self-esteem
- using multiple intelligences
- encouraging a positive attitude to school.

Teacher related goals

- to improve relationships with pupils
- to become aware of previously unrecognised talents of pupils
- to develop new skills for use in the classroom.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

We divided the year in two, in order to work first with the 2nd years, then with the 1st years.

September-January

We worked with three groups of 2nd years, approximately 60 students. There were four teachers involved in different aspects: Design and Costume; Music and Singing; Drama; Dance. They were timetabled for two class periods per week i.e. 70 minutes per week over a 14-week schedule. We held auditions for a production of Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat, rehearsed the show and held two performances in January, for the school and for the parents.

January-May

Having learned by experience, we adopted a more modular approach with the 72 1st years. We offered the pupils a flavour of each aspect of staging a performance i.e. Dance, Drama, Design and Singing. We chose four musicals: Oklahoma, Grease, Annie and My Fair Lady. The pupils were divided into four mixed-ability groups, and each group of eighteen worked for three weeks on each show, rotating through the four activities.

We let the students know that this was a way of experiencing every aspect of a show, and that the end product would not be a fully-finished and polished show. We staged a performance in May.

OTHER PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Arts and Cultural Activities

The students visited the Opera House for a performance of H.M.S. Pinafore. They also took part in two visiting workshops in the school, one given by cast-members of H.M.S. Pinafore and one by members of Stomp.

Professional Development

Two of the project teachers attended a Drama Workshop. One is planning to attend a week's workshop on Planning a School Show run by the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin in August. 2004.

DATA COLLECTED

The 2nd years (who had had previous experience of the show Oliver) needed no coaxing to get involved this year; 18 volunteered immediately to audition for solo singing parts. Although not all were successful, they were self-confident enough to take part in auditions in front of their class-mates. We used a questionnaire at the end to evaluate the pupils' overall experience of the show, and whether they would like to participate again.



The 1st year students were asked in January if they would like to perform. Most of the girls did not feel confident enough to act, dance or sing. Many preferred to get involved in the set design and costumes. After months of coaching and motivating, encouragement and auditions, the scales tipped dramatically and all the girls participated in the performance of the show; many had solo parts.

A brief summary of the results from both 1st and 2nd years is:

- 76 girls said they enjoyed school more because of the show

- 66 girls said they gained more confidence
 - 48 girls said they discovered a new talent
- All of them were able to identify their strengths.

Out of 58 girls who filled in the last questionnaire, 20 actually preferred the preparation for the show, while 36 preferred the performance.

- 40 parents of the 55 girls who performed attended and their comments ranged from "good" to "very good" to "brilliant."

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

Pupils

Pupils were from the start very positive and looking forward to this project; they surprised us by their willingness to become involved in improvisation and acting. The mixed-ability grouping was a success, as behaviour for some improved when they were removed from their normal peer group and experienced the more disciplined behaviour of other pupils.

A side effect, after two years of the project, is that 24 (May 2003) and 30 (May 2004) of the 1st years opted to carry on Music as a Junior Cert. subject. The normal number we would expect would be about 16.

Pupils who were involved in our first year of the project in 2002-2003, and are now in their Junior Cert. Year say that they miss the project and want to be involved in a production when they return in September.

Parents

Parents received official invitations to the 2nd year show, with tea and coffee served and an opportunity to meet teachers. The 1st year show was less formal: the parents were informed of what the children were doing. A positive result was that teachers now had something different to talk about at parent/teacher meetings; they could discuss a pupil's talents as well as their academic progress or behaviour.

Teachers

Two teachers attended Drama workshops and are already using more drama in class. Music ideas from the two Opera House workshops have proved stimulating for classroom development.

Other subject teachers, seeing quiet children come out of themselves on stage, or reveal a talent for singing or dancing, or 'loud' pupils behave in a disciplined way on stage, felt positive about the project. Teachers and pupils (even those not directly involved) agree that there is a great buzz in our school during the preparation of a show, and especially during the last few weeks before the performance, which benefits the whole school atmosphere.

Principal

The Principal has shown great support for the programme, facilitating meeting time for the teachers involved each week for continuous evaluation and forward planning. The school has invested in buying a music keyboard with disc drive for backing tracks, and in improving the stage lighting.

OUR OWN EVALUATION

The best thing about the project this year

- The highlight was how students got a task-experience for all aspects of stage performance. Each girl got involved and were very enthusiastic.
- It was great to see pupils go through the process from preparation to performance and see how much they have learned and developed.
- Teachers got to know students better and developed a better relationship with them outside of the constraints of academic school life. Teachers developed their own creative side, and took pleasure in seeing students' talents blossoming.

CASE STUDY 4.6

PUPILS LEARNING FROM THEIR PEERS

GAELSCOIL AN TEAGHLAIGH NAOFA, BALLYPHEHANE

In this project, a music specialist was engaged to teach tin whistle, recorder and singing to infants, first class and second class in the school.

PROJECT GOALS

- To develop an understanding of rhythm
- to use performance and play as an aid to learning
- to integrate the Irish language with music by teaching traditional songs and dance tunes
- to enhance pupils' listening skills
- to promote good teamwork and co-operation among peers.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Infant class: learned simple songs through Irish

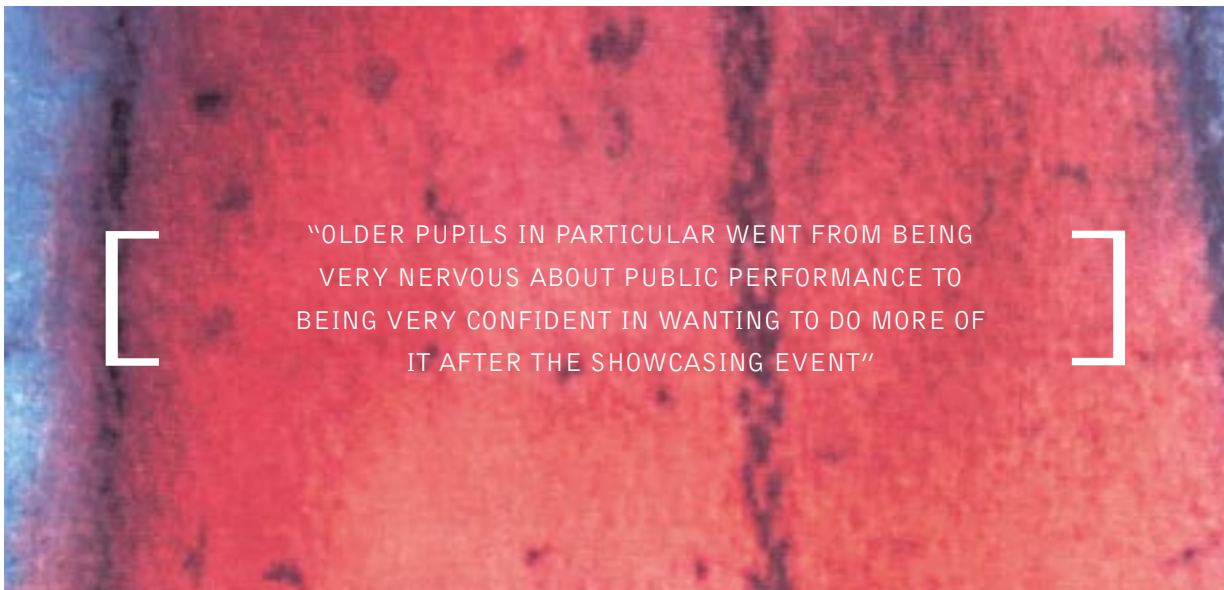
First class: learned simple dance tunes on tin whistle for solo and group performance

Second class: learned to sing in harmony and to play recorder.

OUTCOMES

Each group of pupils developed a good understanding of songs and rhythm. Older pupils developed skills of timing and harmony. All pupils developed good listening skills and an understanding of group performance. They learned how to listen better to each other, and to co-operate with their peers. Older pupils in particular went from being very nervous about public performance to being very confident in wanting to do more of it after the showcasing event.

An important feature of the project was the way in which pupils learned a great deal from their peers. The teacher put pupils together in groups to work with each other, and she noticed that the group brought along weaker learners. There was a strong spirit of collaboration rather than competition in the groups. The groups discussed how they could organise their performance and how everybody in the group could learn the necessary skills. This provided an excellent learning opportunity for the teacher too.



“OLDER PUPILS IN PARTICULAR WENT FROM BEING
VERY NERVOUS ABOUT PUBLIC PERFORMANCE TO
BEING VERY CONFIDENT IN WANTING TO DO MORE OF
IT AFTER THE SHOWCASING EVENT”

CASE STUDY 4.7

THE WHOLE SCHOOL LEARNING ABOUT OTHER CULTURES

ST BRENDAN'S GIRLS' SCHOOL, THE GLEN

This project involved all pupils in the school, together with all staff. The focus of the project was to enable pupils to see and experience different countries and cultures in a concrete and active way.

PROJECT GOALS

Pupil related goals

- To promote familiarity among the children with the diverse cultures of Europe
- To encourage performance in specific curriculum areas, art, music, dance, storytelling, geography
- To broaden the pupils' worldview, expand beyond their immediate locale
- The children would begin to understand the concept of personal, local, national, European and global identity
- Children would appreciate and respect the diversity that exists in society and the positive contributions of various cultural, religious and social groups
- To stimulate and reinforce curiosity and imagination within children about local and wider environments.

Teacher and parent related goals

- Through teamwork involved in drama, dance and projects, the children and teachers would learn from each other, co-operate better, use each other's skills
- Parents would become involved through dance, plays, learning expressions in other languages
- To heighten parent aspirations for the children: 2005 is Cork City of Culture, and this links with our project to encourage parents to look to and beyond Cork as a destination.

PROJECT ACTIVITY

Each class from junior infants to sixth class was immersed in the cultures of two countries. Using a cross-curricular approach, children were given general factual information,

they sampled food, acquired phrases, learned songs and folk dances, and heard folktales.

Junior infants: Ireland and Germany
 Senior infants: Holland and Belgium
 Senior infants and first-class: Spain
 First and second class: Scotland
 Third and fourth class: France
 Fifth and sixth class: Denmark and Italy.

We also had a gardening project, and we planted eight tubs using flowers in the flag colours of the countries that we had studied. The children planted the flowers in April so that they would bloom before the summer holidays. Some parents were involved in this part of the project, which is part of the SESE curriculum.

IMPACT OF PROJECT

The children in all classes experienced different cultures and countries in a tangible way, for example through music and stories. The project was a springboard for multicultural education. During the year we invited a lady from Kenya to come to our school to introduce the children to her culture. She used to dance, drama and art to educate us in her way of life. A man from Jamaica told us vibrant and lively stories about his hometown.

The children became aware of various ethnic, religious and linguistic groupings within the EU and we all explored what it means to belong, to a family, a school, a Community, a City and a country. Topics of bias, discrimination, differences and fairness were all tackled.

It was a whole school project, so each child was aware that every other child in the school was engaged in activities concerning various countries. It stimulated interest in

dance, drama, legends, folktales, music, cookery and language and every aspect of culture and lifestyle of children in other countries. The activities involved group work and co-operation was essential to the success of the project. Interaction with others was important in each activity.

For teachers, the activities highlighted some important insights about children's skills and attitudes and their responses to various social situations.



CASE STUDY 4.8

MATHS FOR FUN IN THE CLASSROOM

A JOINT PROJECT OF HOME SCHOOL COMMUNITY LINKS CO-ORDINATORS

A total of fifteen schools were involved in three Maths for Fun projects.

PROJECT 1: MATHS FOR FUN CLUSTER

Scoil an t-Athar Maitiú, Togher
Togher Boys' School
Presentation Secondary School, Ballyphehane.
Maria Assumpta Junior and Senior Schools, Ballyphehane
Gaelscoil an Teaghlaigh Naofa, Ballyphehane
Morning Star, Ballyphehane.
Greenmount National School
South Presentation National School
Deerpark Secondary School
Scoil an Spiorad Naoimh, Bishopstown

Numbers of Pupils involved

620 Pupils involved
Classes ranged from infants to sixth in the primary sector
First and Second Years in the secondary sector.
136 Parents involved.

PROJECT 2: MATHS FOR FUN, ENGLISH FOR FUN CLUSTER

Holy Cross BNS, Mahon
Gaelscoil Mhachan, Mahon
Scoil Ursula, Mahon

134 Pupils involved, from Junior Infants, First Class, Second Class, Fourth Class
29 parents trained.

PROJECT 3: MATHS FOR FUN

St Mary's on the Hill National School.

This case study is a compilation of the experiences of all three projects.

PROJECT GOALS

- To develop mathematical skills and concepts of the students.
- To involve the parents in the mathematical instruction of pupils.
- To raise the parents' awareness of their own ability in helping their children
- To develop self-esteem and confidence in parents.
- To keep parents close to their children's learning by training and facilitating them as a resource in the classroom

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The project is a team approach including HSCL Co-ordinators, teachers, parents, learning support teachers and principals. The programme involves the parents going into a chosen classroom for approximately fifty minutes a week for six weeks. There are four to six games tables in a room and one or two parents in charge of each table. The games are carefully chosen in conjunction with the class teacher. A group of four to five students spends approximately ten minutes playing at each table and then moves on to the next table. Some schools managed to cover as many as twelve classes.

OUR OWN EVALUATION

The project incorporated fun and real learning with meaningful support from committed parents. All children were challenged and given an opportunity to succeed. There was huge encouragement to children to improve their skills. Children enjoyed the sessions and gained a very positive attitude towards learning, while parents were empowered to fulfil their role as primary educators of their children.

Discussion formed the major part of the evaluation process. This discussion included discussion with parents, teachers and pupils. Pupils were asked to fill out evaluation sheets to state their favourite and least favourite games and their thoughts regarding "Maths for Fun". Evaluation was generally carried out in an informal way. Feedback was very positive from all participants.

The best thing about the project was the high level of involvement by parents. This has to spill into the home environment. In an informal way parents are being trained in parenting skills through actively being involved in their children's learning. This will undoubtedly have positive repercussions for both parent and child.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

Pupils

The impact of the maths for fun project was tremendous. It encouraged attendance and punctuality. Pupils involved displayed a definite increase in positive motivation. There were absolutely no behavioural problems during the sessions. No child requested to leave the classroom during the sessions. Children displayed increased interest. There was a great feeling of enthusiasm generated by the project, which spilled over into the corridors and yard with children asking "when is maths for fun going to happen in our classroom?" All styles of learning were targeted with children displaying previously unrecognised skills in different areas.

Parents

Parents were very positive towards Maths for Fun. They derived as much enjoyment as the children from the sessions. Self esteem and involvement by parents was increased. The visit to UCC by parents had a very positive effect. Parents saw that UCC was accessible to them and their children. This will have a ripple effect on their aspirations for their children. Parents reported that they now saw a possible place for both themselves and their children in UCC.

Teachers

Teachers were very impressed with Maths for Fun. They reported that the level of concentration of pupils on maths skills surprised them. Different talents were also recognised. Teachers felt that they saw some pupils from a different perspective i.e. some pupils who may not display maths ability in the classroom shone at spatial awareness activities. Children with specific learning needs were also highly motivated and involved. Teachers also recognised the high level of interest by parents and this had a knock on effect for other classroom and home activities.

Principal

The principals involved were very enthusiastic about the project and showed their high level of interest by wishing to expand the projects throughout the schools involved.

Learning point

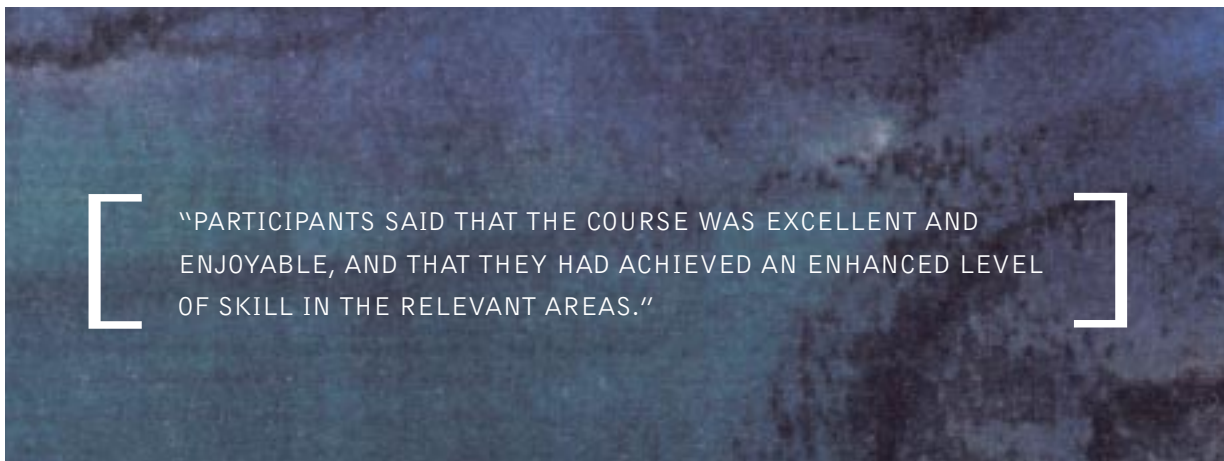
The most important learning point was that parents are more willing to become involved when their own children are the ones they work with. The pride that this engenders in both adult and child is wonderful to behold. The availability of resources led to huge success throughout the academic spectrum. There was something for every child – all learning styles were catered for and these vary widely in each class. It gave every child a chance to shine and to succeed leading to positive self esteem and increased self confidence in the area of Maths. Through Maths for Fun, maths is now seen as a very enjoyable experience not just an academic exercise.

enhanced level of skill in the relevant areas. The timing, location, equipment, course content, teaching and learning methods were judged to be very satisfactory by participants, all of whom have stated that they are currently using their new skills regularly in their classroom practice.

CASE STUDY 4.9

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COURSES FOR TEACHERS



Following on the success of the courses that were run for principals last year, two further information and communications technology courses were provided for principals and teachers from project schools in 2003 - 2004. The courses were funded by the National Centre for Technology in Education and were held in one of the project schools, Scoil an Spioraid Naoimh in Bishopstown. The school's computer facility was used and the course tutor was one of the teachers at the school, John Meaney. Each course consisted of three sessions and the areas covered included:

- Using the Internet
- Using e-mail
- Word processing
- PowerPoint
- File and desktop management
- Multimedia/digital images.

Twenty places were available on each course and the level of demand from teachers was high. Participants were asked to evaluate the course and to say how well they had achieved their own learning goals. The feedback received

was very positive. Participants said that the course was excellent and enjoyable, and that they had achieved an enhanced level of skill in the relevant areas. The timing, location, equipment, course content, teaching and learning methods were judged to be very satisfactory by participants, all of whom have stated that they are currently using their new skills regularly in their classroom practice.

These courses represent an excellent collaborative model of professional development promoted by the Bridging the Gap project. Positive synergy is achieved between a national agency, the National Centre for Technology in Education, a project school and a network of teachers who are committed to enhancing their own professional skills for the benefit of their pupils. Participants have reported a very high level of satisfaction with the courses and it is clear that the skills they have learned have had a direct and positive impact on their classroom practice. They have expressed an interest in attending further IT courses, and all have said that they would recommend the courses to their colleagues.

CASE STUDY 4.10

PROJECT ZERO SUMMER INSTITUTE, HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

The Bridging the Gap project has provided scholarships that have enabled twenty-one principals and three teachers to participate in the Harvard Summer Institute since 2000. As part of this year's evaluation, the project team set out to assess the longer-term impact of this aspect of the project, by gathering feedback from scholarship recipients in the years 2000-2003. An adaptation of Kirkpatrick's (1977) model for evaluating learning was used to assess learners' reactions to the learning experience, the level of learning achieved and the impact of the learning, both on the professional practice of the learners and on their schools. The 2004 participants were asked to record their experiences of the Summer Institute and it is intended to carry out further longitudinal follow-up with this group over the remaining years of the project.

Participants in the Summer Institute since the scholarship programme began said that they greatly enjoyed the Harvard learning experience, and in particular they valued the opportunity to interact and share experiences and learning with teachers from many different countries and cultures. They found the teaching and learning methodologies to be creative, inspiring and thought provoking. They said that they benefited greatly from making in-depth study of the Teaching for Understanding and Multiple Intelligences frameworks, and that their learning had enhanced their professional practice and made a positive contribution to the life of their schools. Some of their comments are included below.

Comments from participants in Harvard Summer Institute 2000-2003

Principal A

"Knowledge that inspires thought, creativity and inspiration is indeed knowledge for life and learning, and that is how I found this experience. Knowledge that

enables me to come home and encourage teachers to change their thinking and methods of teaching and learning is true knowledge.

It helped me to change my mindset and push out the goals of understanding and investigation. For the first time I reflected seriously on what "teaching for understanding" really means and concluded that it is the only real meaning of teaching. I experienced a restlessness with what is and an ongoing struggle to move forward -- a sort of pebble in my shoe!

The experience enabled me to share new methodologies with my staff on my return and encourage them to push out the boat further, which many of them are doing very effectively to the ultimate benefit of the students. Several teachers in my school have espoused Multiple Intelligences and Teaching for Understanding with quite a high level of enthusiasm. Some have been very successful in using methodologies that are new and different. Finally, it is good to spread the "rumour" of these theories around the school at a somewhat "disturb" the complacent and conventional. It can only result in improvement in quality of teaching and learning in the long-term."

Principal B

"A certain amount of confidence in the value of our old system of education comes from the experience in Harvard. The quality of the self-analysis and reflection and planning that has happened over the past five years in Irish primary schools is comparable to any evaluation going on anywhere in the world. The challenge to change our methodologies and practice that is ongoing in Ireland is equal to the best there is at international level...

I have gained in confidence in my readiness to contact the members of the group of principals who attended Harvard

with me to discuss matters related to the school. A great bond of trust was created between the group who travelled together on that trip. I felt more confidence that I was part of world-wide group of individuals who could influence teachers to examine their current practice and make changes and move forward in a coherent way. Anyone who has been exposed to the experience of Harvard brings aspects of the learning to their workplace in a variety of ways, for example dealing with staff colleagues, planning development in curriculum areas, management of resources, supporting staff training and staff well-being. All these aspects of a school's life are important to the success of the school and its community."

Principal C

"What were my main learnings? More and more I see how we must meet the real needs of the school community that we serve. We have to set up programmes that lead to real learning. That is why our school has done work on aggression replacement training over the last three years. This is a real and identified educational need for all of our students. I have also been more and more convinced of the value of experiential learning for staff and students alike. By planning and evaluating our experiences in a meaningful way we make positive progress. I believe we have done this as a whole school staff. For next year we have moved the focus of our Bridging the Gap programme to look at drama as a way of helping students reflect on their life experiences as they move to further learning.

All of this is based upon the notion of moving from what is really known and understood before taking the next step.

I am not sure how much I have changed in my professional practice as result of my visit to Harvard. I think I have been affirmed on my learning journey. I continue to be

enthused by what unfolds in all learning. I enjoyed the unexpected in "taming the wild and wilding the tame". I believe Harvard has helped me to trust the path of my personal growth. I believe I bring this enthusiasm for learning to my school community. In continuing my own professional development I can lead and help others do the same. I must develop if I am to work to help staff and students develop. Much of our whole school involvement in the Bridging the Gap project has been led by the notion of the ongoing individual and collective development of the whole school community. "

Principal D

"I found the trip to Harvard a fantastic learning experience that gave me an added insight into my work as a teacher. It has had an impact on my professional practice in a number of ways. I am much more aware of the Multiple Intelligences theory and I am conscious of the importance of approaching learning through different points. This was one of the main thinking points behind the development of an outdoor learning area in our school in 2003.

One of the biggest benefits of the trip was the opportunity to network with other professionals both from Cork and from the different parts of the world. It was great to meet so many, particularly from the ATLAS schools and discuss the various systems. It was my first time at such an international conference and I really enjoyed it. While we would regularly meet primary teachers informally, we rarely get the chance to meet and socialise with our second level colleagues in the same way. In my study group I worked with the principal of a neighbouring secondary school on a scheme to help the transition of children with special needs from our school to the secondary school. We subsequently put this scheme in place and it is working well."

Principal E

"In general I found the whole experience very enlightening and very positive. I felt that the Irish contingent were way ahead of our counterparts in other places. I came back feeling good about how we do things around here! I certainly found myself refocused on the teaching and learning experiences of our own pupils and I felt that the course challenged our whole notion of understanding, and of meaningful and relevant educational experiences.

It was a very motivating course, it challenges the more traditional views of education and offers very credible alternatives to promote understanding. I liked the emphasis on meaningful assessment and the notion of learning through the arts. In our school we are trying to promote the idea that all children are talented in some way and it is the job of the teachers to find a talent and use it to the benefit of the child and the learning process. I have made a conscious attempt to promote Multiple Intelligences in my own school. I continued my own professional development with the higher diploma and educational administration in UCC and I found myself referring back to the literature received while in Harvard."

Principal F

"My approach now would be to encourage teachers not to be afraid to try things. I found the experience liberating in that many of my own philosophies were confirmed. The smaller group situations facilitated an exchange of ideas from which I learned a lot. Our school now provides a wider range of opportunities so that all pupils are included and feel so, for example a visiting art teacher teaches clay and other visual arts media. The school has benefited from a more enlightened approach among staff. The new primary curriculum approach facilitates the Harvard message."

COMMENTS FROM 2004 PARTICIPANTS

Principal G

"The experience of Harvard showed me that most of the teaching I use is teaching for understanding and left me very positive about myself. It exceeded my expectations: I loved the theoretical aspects and also the practical tips. I felt I was part of a week-long conversation with the same themes and ideas continually washing over me from all directions. I probably don't even realise the impact of this process. I will try to work on encouraging staff and community to be more reflective and to continue good practice in the school, emphasising good learning processes and understanding. I believe that I will be a resource for my staff and recognise and highlight good practice. Also I feel I am coming back with an overall goal."

Principal H

"The experience surpassed my expectations. I think I have increased my level of knowledge considerably and I have also enhanced my skills. I hope to introduce principles of teaching for understanding to the school staff at the next staff meeting and to try and encourage staff members to investigate these principles with a view to using them in their own teaching and planning."

Principal I

The Summer Institute a very professional, well run organisation with a knowledge driven team who are willing to empower others by imparting their expertise and understanding of the Project Zero philosophy. The experience far exceeded my expectations. It has been a worthwhile educational journey, one that cannot be justifiably summed up in an evaluation form. It is difficult to assess the level of knowledge, skills and competence that I have gained at this early stage as I have not to have the opportunity to put it into practice. With regard to

knowledge, I have continued to do a lot of research since I returned and have joined two interactive web sites based in Harvard which are very helpful. In the future, I aim to do more reflection on all aspects of my professional practice, to establish clear goals for the whole school, and to help individual teachers develop clearer “through lines” for their teaching. I hope to use teaching for understanding to help our school to evaluate, to differentiate, to plan methodology. We will take a new look at questioning techniques, to decide how we know what our students know and understand.”

Research Student (Ph.D.)

“I enjoyed having the opportunity to listen, at first-hand, to speak to and ask questions of internationally acclaimed educational researchers and authors, whose works are of relevance to my own research. The experience mostly matched but often exceeded my expectations I was never disappointed. The lecture-style plenaries, practical Workshop style mini-courses and the facilitation of group work in the study groups provided an ideal mix which catered for all learning styles and allowed participants to internalise the concepts. The programme worked as a whole, as the concepts introduced at the plenaries were reinforced at the mini courses and study groups.

The Harvard experience served to reinforce my perspective on the arts and learning and gave me the opportunity to explore avenues towards making arts learning visible, which will be an important aspect of my research. Having direct contact with leading researchers in the field was an invaluable experience for me. I had an opportunity to discuss my concerns relating to making arts learning visible with fellow researchers and through that process my own thinking has been clarified.”