

3 SCHOOLS RESPONDING FLEXIBLY TO THE NEEDS OF LEARNERS AND COMMUNITY

EMPOWERING SCHOOLS TO RESPOND FLEXIBLY TO THE NEEDS OF THEIR LEARNERS AND COMMUNITY HAS A POSITIVE IMPACT AND PRODUCES GOOD LEARNING OUTCOMES



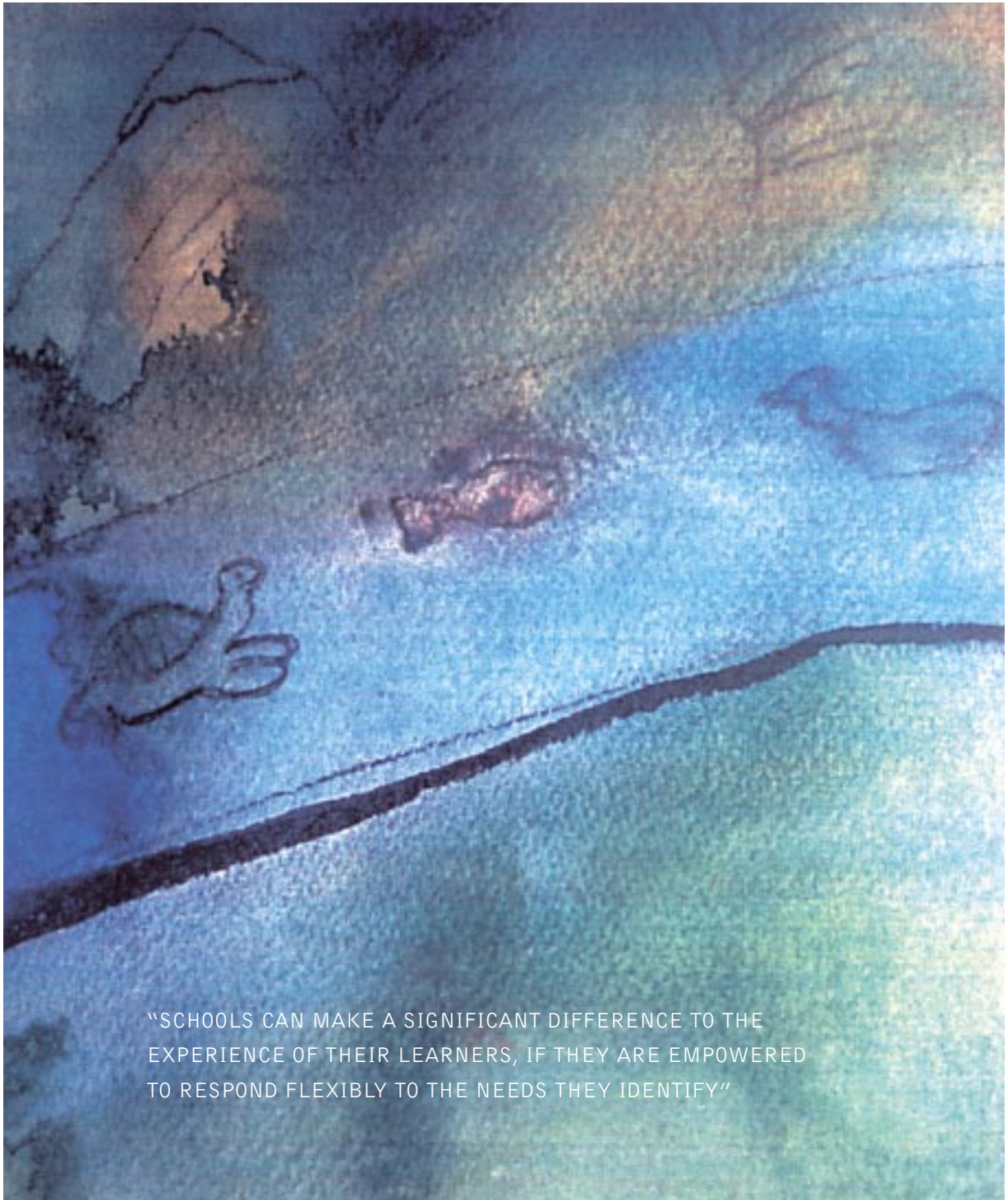
It is one of the fundamental tenets of the Bridging the Gap project that schools can make a significant difference to the experience of their learners, if they are empowered to respond flexibly to the needs that they identify, and if they are enabled to undertake appropriate interventions to address these needs. Recent research suggests that community involvement in education can produce positive outcomes in terms of student achievement and behaviour, family well-being, and levels of interdisciplinary collaboration among professionals (Sammons et al, 2003).

The Bridging the Gap project provides a range of supports for schools that enhance their capacity to identify and respond to the learning needs in their school community. As can be seen from the case studies in this section, the schools in the project have made very creative use of the opportunities offered by the project to implement innovative learning approaches. They have reached out beyond the school and engaged parents, families, local community groups and partner organisations in collaborative endeavours aimed at enhancing the learning experience not only of their own pupils but also of the whole community.

Several schools have built their project as a series of well-integrated and complementary activities over a number of years, and have managed to extend and consolidate their relationships with the community in the process. One school in particular has harnessed the strong local musical tradition by working closely with a well-established band in its area.

A number of schools have targeted the project activity specifically at parents, finding new ways to engage them as active partners in the education of their children. Other schools have developed a range of after-school or out of school activities to complement the learning that takes place in the classroom. In one secondary school for example, close links have been formed with the local youth service to provide a broad complementary learning programme for students.

A very good example of how empowering schools can produce wide-reaching benefits of the whole community is shown in the Food for Life project. This is a project that demonstrates how, with the appropriate supports, schools have the capacity to identify and respond effectively and imaginatively to the needs of their community.



“SCHOOLS CAN MAKE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE TO THE EXPERIENCE OF THEIR LEARNERS, IF THEY ARE EMPOWERED TO RESPOND FLEXIBLY TO THE NEEDS THEY IDENTIFY”

CASE STUDY 3.1

ACTIVELY ENGAGING PARENTS IN THEIR CHILD'S LEARNING

SCOIL AISÉIRÍ CHRÍOST, FARRANREE, HOME/SCHOOL/COMMUNITY LIAISON

In this project, comprehensive pre-entry information packs were prepared for distribution to parents of incoming junior infants for the school year 2004/05 at a meeting in June 2004.

PROJECT GOALS

- To raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their daughter's educational progress at school.
- To advise and support parents on this education related issue.
- To develop and encourage the relationship between home and school through the home/school/community liaison co-ordinator.
- To develop the parents and hence empower them in their daughter's education

PROJECT ACTIVITY

A pack was prepared by the Home/ School /Community Liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator, including general school information for parents, copies of relevant booklets and leaflets published by the Department of Education and Science and the Southern Health Board, and guidelines for parents on language development and learning through play. The pack also contained a small book for parents to read with their children.

An open talk for parents of incoming junior infants was held on 17 June 2004. Forty-four out of the total target

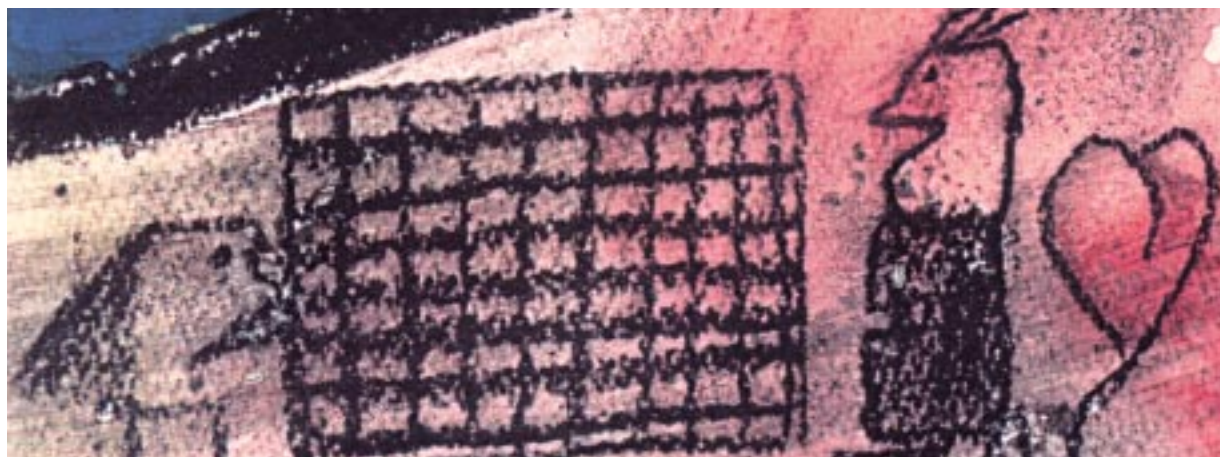
group of fifty-one parents attended. The pack was distributed to those who attended (others will be home visited by the HSCL coordinator and the pack will be explained).

During the month of September, parents will be called in again on a class -by -class basis as a follow-up to this talk. These sessions will be more specific to their needs as their daughter will then be attending school. At this time parents will be asked to put forward their views on the usefulness of the pack and asked for any suggestions for ways in which the pack maybe improved.

IMPACT OF PROJECT

Through this project, the foundation stone has been laid for the relationship between school and parents through the Home/School/Community Liaison coordinator. We have begun to empower parents with the knowledge needed on how best to prepare both themselves and their daughter for school. Parents will know and recognise the Home/ School/ Community Liaison coordinator and realise that her main role is as a support for them during their daughter's years at school.

In the follow-up home visits and meetings, the most appropriate form of Home/School/ Community/Liaison will be planned to meet the educational needs of the girls who will be starting school in August 2004.



CASE STUDY 3.2

DESIGNING A FLEXIBLE AND RESPONSIVE PROJECT

SCOIL URSULA, BLACKROCK

This is the third year of the arts project "From appreciation to performance" in Scoil Ursula. In Year 1 the concentration was on drama. In the second year emphasis was placed on dance. This year we focussed particularly on instrumental music.

The project involved 53 pupils from third and fourth classes, including special needs pupils and pupils from the travelling community. Only four of these pupils had previously learned to play an instrument.

PROJECT AIMS

The project aims to enable the child to explore, appreciate and express ideas, feelings and experiences through music and to enhance her experience of various forms of instrumental music. The ultimate aim is to increase the pupils' self-esteem and to lessen their fears and inhibitions and alienation concerning instrumental music. The specific aims for year 3 of the project were to consolidate of the skills acquired in Years 1 and 2, with an emphasis on music and musical performance, and on learning to play the tin whistle. The goals for the year included:

1. Development of appropriate vocabulary on music, types of music and musical instruments
2. Development of skill of playing tin whistle
3. Development of social and interactive skills through excursions to the musical performances and theatre, through appreciating the performance of their peers and through their own performance
4. Development of musical awareness through exposure to professional performance, orchestral performance and through tuition by a professional music teacher
5. Development of self esteem and confidence through performance for their parents and peers
6. Foster a critical appreciation of their own performance through the use of recording

7. Provide training for teaching staff on the use of music in the classroom

8. Provision of staff training on the use of video, tape, microphones.

PUPIL RELATED GOALS AND RESULTS

Motivation

The pupils greatly enjoyed the musical performance. Although they found the tin whistle difficult especially at first they applied themselves very well especially as they experienced a measure of success.

Family Support

Majority of parents very supportive in helping with practice and in making sure instruments were brought to school.

Teamwork

Pupils learned the necessity of working as a group from observing the orchestra, string quartet and military band. Through their own experience with learning tin whistle, qualities of patience, tolerance and helpfulness towards weaker performers were enhanced.

Music

Their knowledge of musical appreciation and technique increased greatly.

Self-Esteem

Pupils' self-esteem developed through school performance and performance in UCC.

TEACHER RELATED GOALS AND RESULTS

Classroom practice/skills

Teachers developed their skills in regard to musical appreciation, importance of introducing a wide variety of types of music and musical instruments. Music lessons by

class teachers were enhanced by liaison with music teachers, by preparation and follow up work on musical appreciation sessions and by the use of percussion instruments.

Motivation

As the project progressed, class teachers began to devise ways of increasing the pupils' musical appreciation/knowledge without the use of Bridging the Gap funding. For example, they organised visit of an oboist and the army band. They also began to explore new methods of assessment in this area.

GOALS RELATED TO PARENTS

Parents' aspirations for pupils

A number of parents have expressed an interest in pupils learning an instrument outside school.

Visit to UCC

Six parents from our school visited UCC with the Home/School Project. This visit was highly successful and created a more positive attitude to the University which is being reinforced by the Bridging the Gap Music Project.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- Cork Pops Orchestra performance, 25 February
- Concert in UCC, 15 March 2004
- Visit from Oboist, 3 March
- String Quartet, 21 April
- Visit from Band of the Southern Brigade, 20 May
- Drama: performance of Charlotte's Web at the Opera House, 5 May

ASSESSMENT

- Performance assessments
- Questioning, Teacher Observation
- Tests to identify the music type and the instruments played
- Questionnaire
- Instrument recognition test
- Writing a review of Charlotte's Web.

Instrument Recognition Test: results

A cross-section of ten pupils of mixed ability were asked before the concert to name the instruments they would expect to hear in a military band (Test 1).

After the concert the same pupils were tested (Test 2)

Pupil	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Test 1	1	3	4	7	7	4	4	4	4	2
Test 2	14	10	14	7	10	17	14	10	10	5
Improvement	13	7	10	0	3	13	10	6	6	3

There was an improvement in all but one pupil. In seven cases there was a marked improvement.



Pupil's review of Charlotte's Web. (The highlighted words indicate the use of vocabulary taught prior to the performance)

"On the 5 May 2004 we went to see the **production** of Charlotte's Web in the Cork Opera House. The two main **characters** were Wilber the pig and Charlotte his best friend. It was a story of true friendship and how one friend loved the other and of the help from Templeton the rat and all the other animals on the farm.

The **sound** was good, not too loud and not too low and I really liked the **sound effects**. The way there was thunder and rain in the background. **Costumes** were good and the spider outfit was great but the pig outfit could have been a bit better.

The acting was one of the best. The actor who played Templeton the rat was excellent and all of the other actors were good too. At the start the **setting** was rather dull and as it went on the setting was beginning to light up and I really liked when they were at the fair.

The **special effects** were great. I liked the moving clouds in the **background** and at the end when all the eggs came out all six hundred and eighty four of them. The lighting and music fitted the **mood** of the story. There were many other characters the old sheep, the goose, Homer, the Arabes and Fern."

OUR OWN EVALUATION

As is apparent from the above report, the pupils made great progress at both musical appreciation and at learning the tin whistle. This progress is due in no small way the great work of the music teacher. In the coming year it is proposed to continue with the music lessons for the same target group with the introduction of other instruments such as recorders and guitars.

Appreciation of music, drama and dance will be further extended through visits to musical performances and through inviting musicians to the school.

To ensure continued progress in the area of dramatic performance a specialist drama teacher will be employed. This work will be extended by the class teachers using puppets purchased with Bridging the Gap Funding in former years.

CASE STUDY 3.3

CREATING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARENTS

ST. BRENDAN'S GIRLS' SCHOOL, THE GLEN



"Me and my city" was a project run for parents through the Home-School Community Liaison scheme with the support of Bridging the Gap.

PROJECT AIMS

"Knowing me": to up-skill parents in a way that would enhance how they communicate with their children

"Knowing my city": to provide educational trips for parents to make them aware of Cork's culture and its historical landmarks. This was to promote awareness and participation in the upcoming 2005 European Capital of Culture.

PROJECT ACTIVITY

The programme had three modules:

Personal development

- Becoming aware of my own personal mode of operation
- Looking at strengths and weaknesses in how I cope
- Looking at what supports I can put in place to help myself
- Becoming aware of how I can be a better communicator.

Drugs awareness

- Parents were encouraged to assess and challenge their own attitudes towards drugs

- Information was given on the different drugs available, the age group that each appeals to, and the signs to watch out for in young people
- Parents learned about teenagers and how they develop, and how best to communicate with teenagers.

Knowing my city

Trips were organised to various locations in Cork, including the City Gaol, Cobh Heritage Centre, UCC, and a city sightseeing tour.

Fourteen parents attended the course, an increase on the normal response of about 6-8 parents for similar courses in the past. Unlike other courses, the interest shown was exceptional and lasted from January to June, while most other courses last only for six weeks.

Having funding to provide the very enjoyable trips was a real incentive to parents to attend the course. Very valuable learning was provided in all three modules, and after every three sessions there was a trip. Linking the work and play aspects in one course resulted in its success.

DATA COLLECTED

The facilitator asked the parents

- What they found useful about the course
- What they would change about the course
- Any other comments.

General comments about the course from participants

- "This course makes a difference"
- "When you are mixing with others it makes you feel human. You're more than just a mother"
- "Excellent for getting you out of the house, not going back to bed, getting out into life"
- "Great course, I love it. I look forward to Tuesdays"
- "It was fun."

Comments on personal development module

- "This was the best part of the course. Confidentiality was very important and I was able to deal with personal problems"
- "I have already made changes in my life. It has helped me cope with my family"
- "It was a place to go where I was able to discuss problems and feel safe"
- "I would have liked more group sessions with the facilitator. I felt I could trust her, but it was over too soon."
- "The facilitator is really important. Ours was great".

Comments on drugs awareness module

- "Very good, especially when you have teenagers"
- "I'm more aware of solvent abuse and `be on the watch"
- "I learned loads of stuff that I never knew about drugs"
- "It was good to get to know people working in our Community. I would go to them if I needed help".

"I HAVE ALREADY MADE CHANGES IN MY LIFE.
IT HAS HELPED ME COPE WITH MY FAMILY"

CASE STUDY 3.4

LINKING THE SCHOOL WITH THE COMMUNITY

SCOIL MHUIRE NA NGRÁS, GREENMOUNT NS, GREEN STREET

This music in the local community project involved 96 pupils from 3rd to 6th classes and seven teachers, including one music teacher.

PROJECT GOALS

Pupil related goals

- To enable the children appreciate the rich musical heritage of the local community and motivate them to become involved.
- To enhance the self-esteem of the children by giving them an opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument and perform for others.
- To encourage children to work together with others
- To help other children appreciate individual talents and encourage these talents
- To impress upon children and parents the value of having an interest in a particular area and trying something new.
- To value the importance of working at developing a skill in the medium-long term and the importance of keeping up an interest in that task/skill.
- To enhance each child's progress in various areas of the curriculum, particularly in the performing arts and music
- To help prepare children for our 150th year Anniversary Concert, entitled "Celebrating Greenmount" which involved past and present pupils and which was held at City Hall. This particular project included a mini-pageant on the history of the school and the surrounding area, which involved all children from 3rd to 6th classes

Teacher related goals

- To enable the staff appreciate the rich musical heritage of the local community and motivate them to become involved
- To develop an appropriate class level programme in music for the school year.

Goals related to parents and families

- To involve the extended family in their child's education and help them appreciate and develop their child's talents
- To enable parents and families appreciate the rich musical heritage of the local community and motivate them to become involved
- To encourage parents to become involved in our 150th year Anniversary Concert
- To encourage parents to promote the self-esteem of their children by giving them an opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument and perform for others.

DATA COLLECTED

- Performance testing: pupils' ability to play an instrument
- Test at the end of the theory course for 5th class
- Observation by teachers
- Comments from pupils and parents, oral and written
- Progress reports and informal comments to Project co-ordinator and Principal
- Close Liaison with Barrack Street Band
- Related activities including artwork, writing, SESE, Art, Music, Oral Language
- Self-assessment by pupils
- Peer assessment by pupils.

The biggest measurement of achievement of the Bridging the Gap project was our 150th Anniversary Concert at City Hall. This concert celebrated the rich cultural heritage of the Greenmount/Barrack Street area and was a sell-out. Each child participated as did the Barrack Junior and Senior Bands. It was particularly gratifying to see eight past pupils in the Barrack Junior Band at the concert who had progressed through the "Bridging The Gap" project since its inception.



OUR OWN EVALUATION

- The success of the project is visible in the enjoyment and interest of the children.
- Expectations and ambitions of children were highlighted. Because of the Bridging the Gap Scheme, children want to be given the opportunity to take an instrument.
- Use of the school building this year, after school hours, by The Barrack Street Band for their own school of music. The success of the project has put pressure on the Band, space wise, to provide for all who want classes
- The biggest measurement of achievement of the Bridging the Gap project was our 150th Anniversary Concert at City Hall.

PROJECT IMPACT

This has been a very worthwhile and rewarding project which gives children of this area an opportunity they probably otherwise would never have.

- The project emphasised the importance of the school in the wider community, particularly in an inner-city urban area, where many families are transient. It helped to involve not only children, but gave parents a sense of belonging also.
- Goodwill now exists in abundance for anything the school innovates and attempts.

NEXT STEPS

- Extend access to wind/reed instruments (e.g. flute, clarinet)
- Provide in-service Professional Development for interested teachers around music.

CASE STUDY 3.5

PROMOTING GOOD HEALTH AMONG ALL MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

ST JOHN THE APOSTLE BOYS' PRIMARY SCHOOL, MAYFIELD

FOOD FOR LIFE

The school is a member of the Health Promoting Schools Initiative of the Southern Health Board and was keen to bring the message of good nutrition across to the pupils, parents and the wider community in a new and enjoyable way. The Food for Life project is based on the food pyramid as a model for healthy eating. One level or food group was explored and promoted in the school each month, starting in January 2004.

PROJECT AIMS

- To promote good health among all members of the school community
- To help pupils achieve their full potential through a holistic approach to health and well-being
- To provide an opportunity for all members of the school community to explore, experience and enjoy a wide range of good food
- To involve parents, pupils, staff and the local community in a collaborative effort in promoting good health.

PROJECT ACTIVITY

A central part of bringing the message across was a monthly food fair, with each month focusing on a different food group:

January	bread, cereals and pasta
February	fruit and vegetables
March	dairy products
May	meat and fish, confectionery.

The monthly food fair took place in the school hall, and local food producers and retailers were invited to participate. The fair provided a display of produce, an opportunity for parents to purchase products and cookery demonstrations given by professional chefs.

The project was promoted among parents, the local community and the media. Public representatives, including the Minister for Health and Children, attended the food fair, along with Health Board personnel. An article about the project appeared in the Irish Times Health Supplement on 1 June 2004.

PROJECT IMPACT

The concept of the food fair in a primary school is an innovative development in the education of young people. To educate children in the importance of healthy eating and to raise the awareness of a balanced diet is truly education for life. The message is hugely important and the medium is also significant. We have had the community into our school for an interesting and enjoyable experience. Not only parents but neighbours and local residents also. It is a huge opportunity for our pupils to participate in a very public display of what we can do very well, an opportunity to be proud of their school and enhance their self-esteem through positive social contact. Everyone gains.

A CENTRAL PART OF BRINGING THE MESSAGE ACROSS WAS A MONTHLY FOOD FAIR, EACH MONTH FOCUSING ON A DIFFERENT FOOD GROUP..

CASE STUDY 3.6

AFTER-SCHOOL CLUB

SCOIL PADRE PIO, CHURCHFIELD



“THE MAIN GOAL WAS AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS COMPLETED”

This project involved a total of 16 pupils from 5th and 6th classes.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Club sessions were held on Mondays and Wednesdays for 5th class and on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 6th class. Each session lasted for one and a half hours and consisted of fifteen minutes for homework, ten minutes for a snack and thirty minutes for creative activity.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

The main goal was an improvement in the quality and quantity of homework assignments completed. Class teachers reported high success rates in both areas. Positive spin-offs in the areas of behaviour, attendance and attitude were further indicators that the project achieved its goals. The high interest level shown by the children contributed immensely to the success of the project.

CASE STUDY 3.7

LINKING WITH A LOCAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

ST PATRICK'S GIRLS' SECONDARY SCHOOL, GARDINER'S HILL

This project involved a total of 78 young people, in four groups, each of which included students from one year-group.

PROJECT GOALS

Pupil related goals

- Increased school attendance
- Increased participation in school and out-of-school activities
- Improved pupil interaction with peers and teachers
- Improved communication skills and self esteem
- Increased motivation and increased learning disposition
- Improved behaviour.

Teacher related goals

- Improved interaction with pupils
- Increased communication and interaction with parents.

Goals related to parents and families

- Increasing the interaction between the parents and the school
- Encouraging the level of support for their children and for the school to increase.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

All four of the Bridging the Gap groups participated in tailor made programmes that were implemented between September 2003 and May 2004 on a weekly basis. The programmes were developed to meet the needs of each particular group and were therefore all different. However each was designed to achieve the project goals.

The pupils involved in the project groups took part in a wide range of activities over the year. For example:

- The 6th year group completed a ten-week art programme that was aimed at developing personal, communication and team work skills.

- Each pupil involved in the 5th year group explored and researched the career of her choice and then a series of talks were given by people working in the careers that the pupils expressed interest in.
- The 1st and 3rd year groups participated in a dance, drama, cookery and development education workshops, games and outdoor activities and day trips.

All of the groups participated in an out-of-school Easter Activity Programme and during the year enjoyed many outings, including a day trip to Fota on Ice, trips to the cinema, UCC, the Everyman Theatre, the Tig Fili, and lunch out in Restaurants.

DATA COLLECTED

Every weekly session was evaluated by the group, teacher involved and youth worker.

Comments were recorded by teachers, parents and pupils involved in the programme.

Self and peer assessment by pupils were also undertaken.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

The Bridging the Gap project has had a very positive impact on the school and has had an excellent impact on the pupils involved in it.

The pupils, teachers and parents have all benefited from the project. Very important relationships and links have been established as a result of the project. The participation, attendance, learning disposition and behaviour of all of the students involved in the project has been noted by teachers, parents and youth workers. In addition the project has enabled new relationships to be built with some parents and in other cases has strengthened existing links.

OUR OWN EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The Bridging the Gap Project is an excellent initiative in St Patrick's School. The pupils involved in the project have greatly benefited from it and for some it marks a turning

point in the way they relate to their peers and to their teachers. This project is really targeting pupils who need the extra support and guidance and is enabling new learning and skill development.

