

*Piloting Integration at Educate Together's Second-level Easter Camps:
Student Perspectives*

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Thanks are also due to Co Dublin VEC, and to the Principal of Adamstown Community College, Des Newton, who allowed Educate Together to use the school as the venue for the Second-level Easter Project 2012.

Thank you to all, for your support, hard work, enthusiasm and valuable contributions.

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SUMMARY

This Evaluation Report describes and evaluates participants' responses to two pilot initiatives by Educate Together's Second-level Project, the Easter Camp 2011 and Easter Project 2012. The Easter Camp was held in Bridge21's innovative Learning Space, which is specifically designed for team-based, technology-mediated activities. The Easter Project took place at Adamstown Community College, and provided a useful opportunity to use specialist classrooms such as ICT and Science Labs in a real school context.

The aim of both initiatives was to pilot integrated approaches to the Junior Cycle curriculum with participants in the Junior Cycle age range to find out if this could result in providing a more relevant, connected learning experience for them.

Qualitative data obtained from these two initiatives will provide valuable insights into how integrated approaches are perceived by students and also by organisers, facilitators and observers. It will inform opportunities for further research into the area of curriculum integration as we move closer to the opening of our first second-level schools in 2014.

The report shows that participants in both Easter Camp 2011 and the Easter Project in 2012 found the experiences enjoyable, and that they had developed knowledge and skills in many areas. The majority of participants from both initiatives indicated that they liked doing projects that linked subjects together, with many agreeing that this would be the best way to learn in Junior Cycle. Their positive comments reveal that whilst they enjoyed the programme activities, they also felt that their learning benefited from this integrated approach to curriculum.

Recommendations for future pilot projects include:

- Work with a Junior Cycle class group in a second-level school during the school term rather than in school holidays.
- Establish relationships with teachers at a particular school who would collaborate on an interdisciplinary /cross-curricular project for a term or half term.
- Involve participants more centrally in the planning process.
- Allow more planning time in advance of the project, with links between subjects to be made more explicit.

INTRODUCTION

This Evaluation Report describes and evaluates participants' responses to two pilot research initiatives by Educate Together's Second-level Project, the Easter Camp 2011 and Easter Project 2012. The projects have formed part of the organisation's research into approaches to integrated curriculum, following the publication of its Second-level Blueprint in 2009.¹ The aim of both initiatives was to pilot alternative, integrated approaches to the Junior Cycle curriculum with participants in the Junior Cycle age range to find out if this could result in providing a more relevant, connected learning experience for them.

Educate Together

Educate Together is an educational charity and school patron body. There are currently 68 primary schools in the Educate Together network (Educate Together National Schools). Educate Together was sanctioned as a second-level school patron in 2011, and is involved in the patronage of three new second-level schools due to open in September 2014.

Educate Together schools are grounded in the four principles outlined in the organisation's Charter.² They are multi-denominational in character, ensuring that children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds have equal access to, and rights within the school. They are co-educational and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities. They are learner-centred, and this principle underlies not only the curriculum but also the management of the school. Finally, Educate Together schools are run on a democratic basis, encouraging active participation by parents in the daily life of the school while affirming the professional role of teachers.³

Second-level Project

For several years, parents of pupils at Educate Together primary schools had

¹ Taking the Next Step, A Blueprint for Educate Together second-level Schools (2009)

² The Educate Together Charter (last amended 1999), <http://www.educatetogether.ie/about-2/charter/>

³ The Educate Together Charter (last amended 1999), <http://www.educatetogether.ie/about-2/charter/>

expressed an interest in sending their children on to a second-level school of the same ethos. In 2007 Educate Together embarked on its Second-level Project, and began to campaign actively towards achieving this goal. Much work has been completed along the way, including a 2008 survey by Trinity College Dublin (Seery et al.),⁴ which had been carried out on behalf of Educate Together, and provided clear evidence that parents who send their children to Educate Together primary schools would send them to an Educate Together second-level school if one existed.

Second-level Blueprint

In 2009, Educate Together published *Taking the Next Step: A Blueprint for an Educate Together Second-level School*. This publication describes the vision, mission and values of Educate Together at second-level, guided by the four core principles as laid down in the Educate Together Charter. The purpose, as outlined in the Blueprint's Introduction, is as follows:

*The Blueprint aims to provide a basis for the development of the Educate Together model at post-primary level that educators, families and the wider community will continue to contribute to and develop into the future. The Blueprint should be seen as a work in progress.*⁵

Recognition as second-level patron

In May 2011, at the Educate Together Annual General Meeting, Minister for Education and Skills Ruairi Quinn announced that Educate Together was now recognized as a second-level patron.⁶ The following month the Department of Education and Skills announced a number of new second-level schools to be opened in 2014 in several areas, and invited school patrons to apply. In early 2012 Educate Together submitted applications for patronage of new second-level schools in five areas including: Lusk, Greystones, Drogheda, Blanchardstown West, Tyrrelstown (the latter two in Dublin 15), and were notified of the Department of Education and Skills' decisions to award patronage in July of that year. Educate Together was successful in their patronage applications in Drogheda, Co Louth

⁴ Trinity College Dublin

⁵ Blueprint, P3

⁶ Educate Together AGM held in Gorey ETNS, 28 May 2011

(joint application with Co Louth VEC) and in Blanchardstown West, Dublin 15. Prior to these announcements, agreement had already been reached between Educate Together and Co Dublin VEC to establish a Community College in formal partnership with Educate Together in the South Lucan area.

New Second-level Schools

The new schools set to open in 2014 are named below. All three are expected to implement the Educate Together Charter and the Second-level Blueprint when they open in 2014.

- *Hansfield Educate Together Voluntary Secondary School*, Dublin 15 (Educate Together as sole patron)
- *Kishoge Community College*, South Lucan (Co Dublin VEC as patron; in formal partnership with Educate Together)
- *Ballymakenny College*, Drogheda (Co Louth VEC and Educate Together as joint patrons in a new type of community school).

Integrated Curriculum

The Blueprint recommends that organising a curriculum that crosses subject boundaries is an approach that will provide a more relevant, connected learning experience for students. In its Chapter on Curriculum, Teaching & Learning there is extensive discussion of the rationale for integrating the curriculum at second-level. To explain what is meant by 'integrated curriculum' the following quote from the Blueprint is useful:

In general, the definitions of an integrated or interdisciplinary curriculum include a combination of subjects; an emphasis on projects; sources that go beyond the textbook; relationships between concepts; thematic units; flexible timetable and flexible student groupings.⁷

It acknowledges the current position in Ireland's post-primary schools, where the majority of classes take place in separate, timetabled subject classes. This, according to the Blueprint, 'can lead to a fragmented and incoherent learning experience, as well as overlap and/or omissions in learning, as one teacher rarely knows what another teacher is doing.'⁸

The Blueprint draws on research evidence to show how a thematic, interdisciplinary curriculum, can improve students' learning outcomes⁹ and also refers to studies that suggest that an integrated approach can 'facilitate multiple ways of teaching and learning and develop lifelong learning skills as students encounter knowledge and skills in an integrated fashion, as they do in the real world, rather than in discrete, compartmentalised subject areas.'¹⁰

⁷ Blueprint, page 12

⁸ Blueprint, page 12

⁹ Darling-Hammond, Aness, Ort, (2002) Seven year study of the Coalition Campus Schools Project in NYC, referenced in the Blueprint, page 13

¹⁰ Blueprint page 13

There are several different approaches to integrating curriculum. The Blueprint outlines three approaches, which are summarised as follows:

- Multidisciplinary curriculum – two or more subjects are connected around a theme, issue or topic
- Interdisciplinary curriculum – subjects combine to solve problems or consider issues
- Projects, and problem-based learning – organisation of curriculum around significant problems and issues, identified by teachers and learners.¹¹

Background to the Easter Camp and Easter Project

At the time of initiating the first of these projects in 2011, Educate Together had not yet been sanctioned to open its first second-level schools, so it was necessary to recruit current pupils and recent graduates from the Educate Together primary school network. The projects, therefore, took place during the Easter Holidays in both 2011 and 2012, and involved participants drawn from a range of schools, both at primary and second-level. The majority of those taking part were in 6th Class primary, or in 1st Year at second-level, although in 2012 the age range was wider with some Transition Year students involved.

The Easter Camp in 2011 was a joint initiative with Bridge21, and took place at their learning space on the campus of Trinity College Dublin. In 2012, the Easter *Project* as it was now called, took place at Adamstown Community College, Dublin. Permission to use the school building was granted by the school's Principal and by Co Dublin VEC.

The aims and objectives of the Easter Camp 2011 and Easter Project 2012 focused on finding out student responses to the integrated approach to curriculum used. At the Easter Project 2012, however, there was also an emphasis on engaging

¹¹ Blueprint, page 12

teachers in the planning process at an early stage, and engaging volunteer teachers to assist in running the Project.

Qualitative data obtained from these two initiatives will provide valuable insights into how integrated approaches are perceived by students and also by organisers, facilitators and observers. It will inform opportunities for further research into the area of curriculum integration as we move closer to the opening of our first second-level schools in 2014.

Methodology

The Easter Camp 2011 and Easter project can be examined as individual case studies within an overall action research cycle whereby Educate Together aims to explore and define possible approaches to integrated curriculum for Junior Cycle. The Easter Camp and Easter project illustrate selected approaches to integrating the Junior Cycle curriculum.

Both qualitative and quantitative data may be collected in a case study, however for the purposes of the Easter Camp and Easter project the data is qualitative-led. A number of data collection tools were selected, as detailed in the table below. (See Appendix X and Appendix Y for copies of relevant documents).

Data Collection Tools	
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily reflection sheets (team) • Post-questionnaire (individual) • Work output (projects/presentations) • Video footage/photographs
Observers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation protocol
Programme organisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation protocol • Post-questionnaire

Data collected via the reflection sheets and post-questionnaire was explored and analysed for emerging themes in relation to the students' perceived impact of the Easter Camp and Easter Project, specifically in relation to integrated curriculum, the use of technology to mediate students' learning (in the Easter Camp) and the team-based approach to the learning activities. The observation protocols completed by volunteer observers and the programme organisers were explored in further detail and analysed in support of or contradiction to the emerging themes from students' comments.

Research Limitations

The research was limited in a number of ways. For instance the number of participants was lower in both initiatives than is the norm in a second-level class context. Even though we had aimed to recruit 25 participants both years, we were successful in recruiting only 18 for the Easter Camp, and 11 for the Easter Project the following year. It was difficult to actively recruit participants during school holidays for what was essentially a curriculum project, and needed to 'sell' the idea

of the Camp and Project to potential participants, which was a difficult balance. Also, most participants were enthusiastic and motivated throughout, raising the question of whether this would be realistic in a second-level school context. Not knowing the participants until the first day, and being unfamiliar with their individual interests and abilities was another limitation.

The Easter Camp 2011

The Second-level Easter Camp took place during the Easter holidays in April 2011. Planning for the initiative had been on-going for several weeks within Educate Together, with key involvement from education staff, second-level working group members, and importantly, Bridge21 (then known as Bridge 2 College).

Bridge21

Bridge21 is a joint venture between Trinity College Dublin and Suas Educational Development (an education-focused NGO). Since its inception in 2007, an alternative model for 21st century learning has been developed – trialled and tested for four years in an out-of-school context and, more recently, in the formal classroom on a pilot basis. Research conducted by the Centre for Research in IT in Education (CRITE) at Trinity College has evaluated and underpinned the development of the learning model. For the last number of years, Bridge21 has been working closely with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) on the Junior Cycle reform programme to pilot its learning model in a range of second-level schools, including DEIS schools that are linked to the Trinity Access Programmes¹².

The Bridge21 learning model is designed to release the potential of technology-mediated learning, through a structured move away from individualised, teacher-led learning. The essential elements of the model are:

- A structured team-based pedagogy influenced by the Patrol System learning method of the World Organisation of the Scout Movement.
- A physical learning space designed and configured to support team-based learning.
- Adult support that seeks to guide and mentor, with teachers orchestrating and scaffolding team activities.
- Delivery of subject content through student-led projects.

¹² Conneely C., Girvan C., Tangney B. (2012). An exploration into the Adaptation of the Bridge21 model for 21st Century Learning in Irish Classrooms: Case Study Report for the NCCA, Dublin, Ireland;

- Technology used as an integral tool in the learning process.
- Incorporation of team and individual reflection as a regular part of the learning.
- Cross-curricular thematic learning¹³.

The Bridge21 learning model fitted well with Educate Together's own purposes to pilot an integrated approach to the curriculum at Junior Cycle. Planning for the Easter camp took place in collaboration with Bridge21 staff, and their Learning Space was also generously provided for the duration of the Camp. They also facilitated key learning activities on the first day of the Camp, and co-ordinated the selection of teams for the camp programme.

The Aims of the Easter Camp 2011 were as follows:

- To introduce students to a project-based, integrated curriculum experience
- To develop students' confidence and skills in teamwork, communication, critical and creative thinking and self-reflection.
- To develop students' knowledge and understanding of selected topics/themes from Junior Cycle

The development of key skills was highlighted as an important area to address. Educate Together's Blueprint emphasises the importance of embedding skills across the curriculum, Bridge21's learning model has a strong focus on the development of 21st century skills, and the National Council for Curriculum and assessment (NCCA) had also identified Key Skills for a new Junior Cycle in *Innovation and Identity: Ideas for a New Junior Cycle*.¹⁴ That included: communicating, working with others, critical and creative thinking, being personally effective.

¹³ Lawlor, J., C. Conneely, et al. (2010). Towards a Pragmatic Model for Group-Based, Technology-Mediated, Project-Oriented Learning – An Overview of the B2C Model. TECH-EDUCATION 2010. M. D. Lytras. Athens, Greece, Springer. 73: 602-609.

¹⁴ NCCA, Innovation and Identity: Framework for a New Junior Cycle (www.ncca.ie)

The Easter Camp took place over 3 days at Bridge21's Learning Space, part of the TCD campus. Most of the 18 participants had been recruited from a variety of Educate Together primary schools and were currently in 6th Class, with a smaller number who were recent graduates of Educate Together primary schools currently in 1st Year at second-level. One participant attended a primary school that was not in the Educate Together network.

Contact was made with prospective participants via Educate Together school principals, who were invited to nominate students, past or present. Parents could also apply for a place on behalf of their child. Educate Together aimed to 'establish a good mix of boys and girls from all abilities and backgrounds in the group.'

The theme for the Easter Camp (Survival) had been chosen in advance, as part of the planning process. A series of activities were developed and included in the programme for the four-day camp.¹⁵ These included making a video, research on a geographical location, creating a website to share the information, writing a survival guide and presenting their findings as a team on the last day of the Camp. The Camp programme incorporated aspects of Bridge21's Learning model, for example each team elected a team leader to take responsibility for that role throughout the project duration. Participants were allocated teams on a random basis, with the aim of achieving a good gender and age mix.

The aim was also to replicate a second-level school type environment, so programme activities were timed so that participants would experience over 5 hours' teaching and learning time each day. Similarly, the aim was also to make the student/teacher ratio as realistic as possible, with one facilitator working with the entire group for specific sessions.

Easter Project 2012

The Easter project was held at Adamstown Community College over four days during the Easter holidays. A total of 11 participants completed the Easter Project, a smaller group than the previous year. As before, Educate Together publicised the initiative via its website and network of schools. Publicity material was also

¹⁵ See Appendix A, Easter Camp Outline

displayed in schools and community venues in the local area. Planning for the Easter Project took place with Education staff at the National Office and also involved Curriculum, Teaching & Learning working group members. There was a conscious effort to recruit volunteer teachers to help towards planning and facilitating on the project itself, with information and advertisements displayed on the Educate Together website and included in second-level newsletters.

A variety of approaches to curriculum integration for this Project were suggested during the planning phase. Following much discussion, it was decided to use a theme (Disaster) to underpin the team-based activities that the participants would engage in during the Project programme.

Planning meetings took place with Education staff, volunteer facilitators and working group members, who discussed and suggested ideas for inclusion in the programme. An outline plan was developed, which included a variety of activities and guest facilitators.¹⁶

Student Objectives for the Easter Project were identified as follows:

1. Students will work in teams to develop and devise their own project tasks based on their own interests using the Disaster theme/related themes
2. Students will collaborate with each other in teams and will participate in some core activities led by teachers (eg scratch programming, podcasts, science, design)
3. Students will complete a range of tasks based on chosen theme and will work towards a presentation of their project work on Friday afternoon

¹⁶ See Appendix B – Easter Project Plan

Participants experienced podcasting, scratch programming, science experiments, team skills development and other activities during the programme. As in the previous year, participants worked in teams, but did not have an assigned team leader. Also different this year was the way in which each team was invited to explore topics that appealed to them within the broad theme of Disaster. They also worked towards completing a final presentation for the last day of the project.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Overall Experience

Participants completed a questionnaire at the end of the camp in which they rated their experiences (See Appendix C). They rated their overall experience of the Easter Camp 2011 as either excellent (n=11) or good (n=6). In response to the question, *Why do you feel this way?* Comments included:

It was fun and I learned a lot of new things

Because I learned a lot and made new friends

Because I had a great time and it sounds like a good idea

It was loads of fun and easy to work with others

13 students said that the activities they liked best were the ICT and multimedia (e.g., video-making and web design). Other favourite activities included meeting new people/making new friends (n=3), working in a group (n=1) and the drama exercises (n=1). The majority of students indicated that there was no aspect of the Easter Camp that they liked the least. However, comments from those who did respond included:

The writing

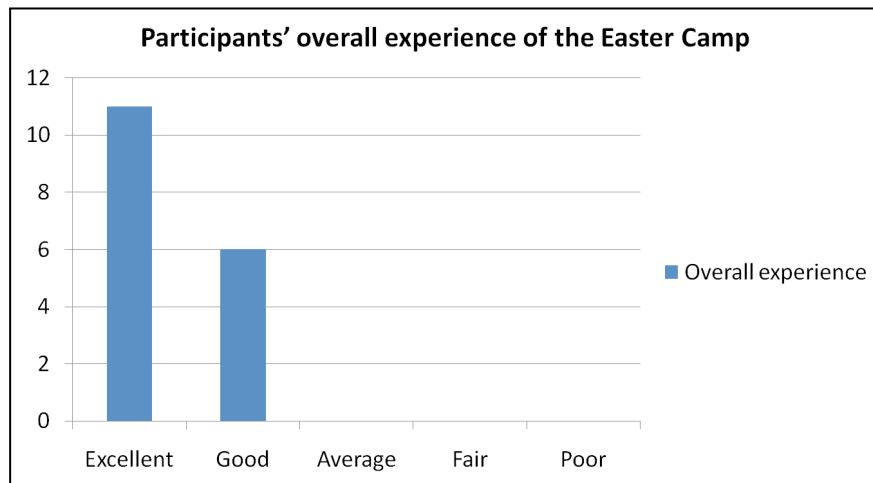
Some of the things were boring

When we were not on the computers

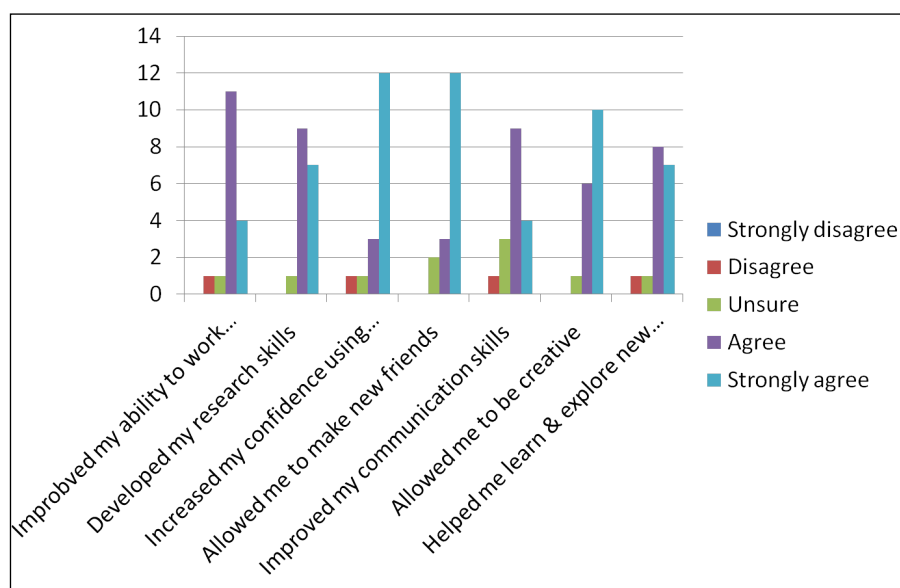
Rushing some work for deadlines

The website was fun but very hard

The research task



In relation to participants' perceived impact of the Easter Camp on their personal learning, the majority agreed or strongly agreed with all of the statements. 12 participants strongly agreed that the experience increased their confidence using technology, while 3 agreed with this statement. 11 students agreed that there was an improvement in their ability to work with others, 4 strongly agreed, while there was one student who disagreed and one other who was unsure. 10 students strongly agreed that the Easter Camp's learning methodology allowed them to be more creative, with 6 students agreeing and one unsure.



The impact of Teamwork

A number of students made statements in relation to their experience of working as part of a team during the Easter Camp. When asked about three things they had learned about themselves and how they learn, they referred to teamwork as a positive contributor to their learning:

Working as a team speeds things along

I learnt how to work together with a team

I can work well in a team

When asked whether or not they would learn better if they worked as part of a team in school 10 students said yes, validating their answer with comments such as:

If someone was having a problem with something they could be put in a group with someone who does understand it so that nobody will be left behind

It's more fun, you feel less lonely

Group work helps you feel like there is someone there for you

Everyone can contribute – then you can learn things that the teacher might not know

There were 6 students who were unsure whether they would learn better as part of a team in school. However, most did not include a comment with their answer, with only one student offering their point of view: *I think it's important to work in teams but also individually.*

The particular approach of the Bridge21 model to teamwork, which was adopted during the Easter Camp, encourages students to develop individual and collective capacities through building on their individual skills, talents and experience. There is a significant emphasis on the development of a mutually supportive team spirit and the development of one member of the team into the role of leader. The team's relationship with the teacher is then moderated through the team leader, so that the

team is generally self-managing and reaches decisions based on group consideration and consensus. Post-questionnaire responses relating to whether or not students thought it important to have a team leader yielded insights into their understanding of the team system applied during the Easter Camp. 2 students considered it very important and 6 indicated it important to have a team leader, supporting their point of view with comments such as:

They can take charge in times of difficulty and solve problems

Someone needs to lead the team

To make sure things get done

So they can make the decisions instead of everyone fighting

A further 3 students considered it slightly important to have a team leader. Their comments reveal a depth of understanding of the role of the team leader and, in particular, the link to the teacher and/or facilitator:

We can all decide on things, but a team leader is good for going to meetings and so on...

I think it's good to mainly work together but it can help having someone to organise us

Of the 2 students who considered it not important to have a team leader, their comments indicate a lack of understanding of the role of the leader in the team system and in the learning activity:

I don't think there is a point in having a leader because I think that's just saying there's a boss

This suggests that there is a need on the part of teachers to invest time in the development of leadership skills and to build understanding amongst team members regarding the role of the leader and its purpose in the functioning of the team.

Students' response to Integrated Curriculum

The Easter Camp participants were generally very positive about the integrated aspect of their learning experience. 15 students indicated that doing projects that linked subjects together would be the best way to learn in Junior Cycle. Their positive comments reveal that whilst they enjoyed the learning activities, they also felt that their learning benefited from this approach to curriculum:

Linking subjects reduces the amount of time spent on them and makes it more interesting as you can see how different things relate to each other;

I learned a lot here in the camp in ICT more than in school

I'd like having fun doing projects while working

It's a more fun way to learn which will make it easier

3 students expressed the view that it was important to do projects that linked subjects together but also to have separate lessons for each subject:

It is important to have a balance, make things more interesting

I think a mixture would be good

Students' attitude to assessment

There was no formal test or written examination during the Easter Camp. Instead, students were assessed on their skills, as well as on the quality of work they produced and presented in front of their peers and the camp facilitators. The final question explored students' attitude towards this approach to assessment and 15 students indicated that they perceived it to be useful. Some comments reveal that students felt that this approach to assessment was fair, easier and more enjoyable. In other comments, many students cite the nerves and pressure generally associated with written terminal examinations as the primary reason for preferring an alternative assessment process:

It relieves pressure off students

It doesn't put as much pressure on you

Because you aren't so nervous about tests and stuff

It is not so nerve-wracking, you can get on with your work

Other comments highlight that students found this approach to assessment helpful to their learning and in developing an awareness of their skills and capabilities:

It is important to see if you are improving

It's important that someone knows what you are capable of

I just think it's useful to assess while we work

One student suggested a balanced approach: *I do but I think you also need written tests*. There was one negative response to this question, but the participant did not add a reason.

Easter Project 2012

Students' Overall Experience

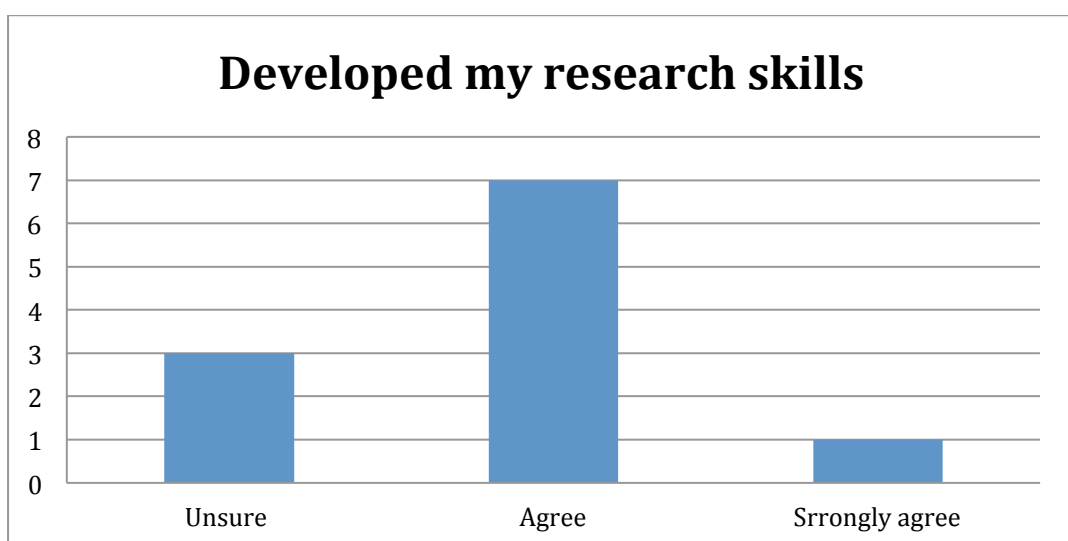
The participants rated their overall experience of the Easter Project 2012 as either excellent (n=5) or good (n=7).

By far the most popular activity during the Easter project was the scratch programming (n=7) followed by teamwork/projects (n=4) and podcasting (n=3).

In relation to participants' perceived impact of the Easter Camp on their personal learning and skills, the majority agreed or strongly agreed with all of the statements.

All participants agreed that the Easter Project had improved their ability to work with others, with 3 of them strongly agreeing, and only 1 participant unsure about this.

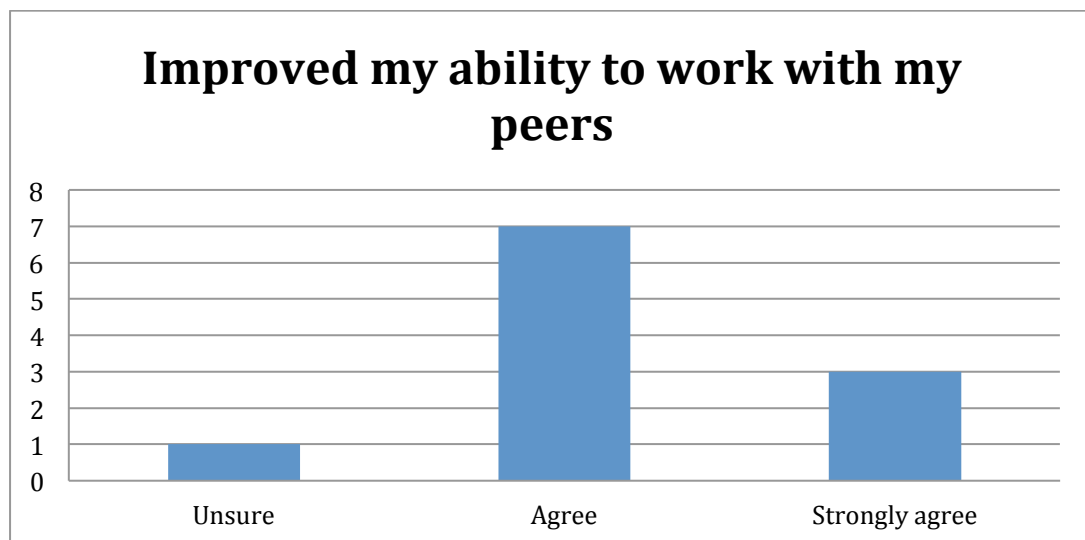
The majority of participants also felt that their research skills had improved, with 3 unsure. 7 participants agreed that the project had helped them stay focused and on task, with 4 unsure. Most participants agreed that doing the Easter project had improved their communication skills, and allowed them to be creative, with only 1 participant unsure.



Learning Styles

In relation to participants' perceived impact of the Easter Project on their learning styles, all participants agreed that they now had a clearer understanding of how they learn, with 5 participants strongly agreeing and 6 agreeing. The majority of participants were able to identify their preferred learning style(s) with 4 stating that their preferred learning style was *Kinaesthetic*, and another 4 identifying themselves as *Visual* learners. 1 participant did not identify a learning style, 1 participant identified visual and auditory, while another said that all styles were applicable.

The impact of Teamwork



With the majority of participants having indicated that they had improved their ability to work with others from doing the Easter Project, it follows that they were also very positive in their comments about teamwork. All participants agreed that they felt they would learn better in school if teamwork was a more regular feature. Many participants felt very positive about the experience of working in a team, commenting thus:

It is fun and everybody has a say.

Because it is hard to do it all by yourself and it's nice to work together and share ideas.

We would get more ideas in a group.

But there were also more thoughtful comments, revealing that some participants had experienced teamwork in a more negative way. The views expressed show insight and awareness of the challenges to working effectively in a team when there are varying levels of interest and/or ability. Comments also highlighted the difficulties that can arise when some individuals prefer working independently rather than as part of a team:

The bad part would be if some people did no work and the others did it all.

It depends on who I'm with, because some teammates can/do not contribute and otherwise.

Teamwork is good, but there will always be people of different abilities and challenges. It can be very difficult with different needs.

In school the teacher usually tells you what to do but if you are working in a group you have more independence.

I enjoy working with others but sometimes I feel like I can do certain things better alone.

One participant also commented that he preferred teamwork 'because I've got less work to do,' highlighting the situations that can arise in a group when individual team members do not always contribute their fair share.

Students' response to Integrated Curriculum

The Easter Project participants were generally positive about the integrated aspect of their learning experience. 5 participants indicated that doing projects that linked subjects together would be the best way to learn in Junior Cycle. Reasons given included:

It's more interesting.

It's easier.

Because it is fun.

Because it will make more sense.

It's more interesting and if you don't like a subject you aren't always aware that you are learning it.

However, 6 participants expressed the view that doing separate subjects and projects would be preferable:

Because projects can be difficult, and sometimes I like doing separate subjects.

I think it would really strain the links between subjects that are very different, however many overlap.

I believe certain, more technical subjects should be a little separate from other ones.

Some additional questions were included in the questionnaire for the Easter Project 2012, such as: What new knowledge did you learn?

I learnt about my topic, I also learnt to use ICT.

I learned about apartheid, which I never really learned about before, and I learned how to use Scratch

I learned about apartheid and nuclear plants. I never knew about them before.

How much Titanic weighed

When Nelson Mandela was born

I found the apartheid presentation quite interesting

I learnt so much about Fukushima, Titanic and Apartheid.

Well, I learned some basic info on each, and what are effective uses of ICT.

The responses reveal that the participants were interested in their chosen topics and had discovered new information and facts about them. However, it may also reveal an emphasis on the 'what' rather than 'why' in their project research, as the focus seems to have been very much on gathering information and facts on a topic. The majority of participants also said they had enjoyed working on their projects explaining:

I was very interested in it.

I made new friends in my team and we worked together as a team.

It was fun.

I was always interested in South Africa and Apartheid and now I was given a chance to learn more on it.

Because we all worked well together and all had different ideas but combined them as one.

However, some comments were not so positive, perhaps suggesting that the topic choices made by at least one team did not work as successfully as some others, and that there may have been insufficient time to make changes.

I found it complicated and I feel as though it wasn't that interesting.

Once I got into it I enjoyed the topic but I didn't know anything about it and (it) was tough at times.

It was kind of complicated and boring.

Observers, Facilitators, Organisers' Views

Comments made by observers, facilitators and programme organisers on both the Easter Camp and Easter Project will be discussed in this section. Observations were very positive, about the quality of the venue during the Easter Camp, for example:

Limiting computers in the Pod spaces works well. It encourages communication and working together.

The potential that an integrated approach offers is highlighted also:

Project also allows for a wide variety of topics to be touched on.

However, detailed observations on how the teams interacted and worked together in both the Easter Camp and Easter project reveal the challenges in teamworking, when interest, ability levels and focus differ from group to group:

Groups needed more intervention from facilitator to structure their thoughts, some found it hard to stay on track.

Teamwork varied from group to group.

Some groups working as a unit, others have individuals left outside the loop.

Only one group strong on documenting ideas

How do you improve ability levels?

Facilitators on both initiatives reported positive experiences in facilitating. In response to questions, such as 'What worked? What didn't? How could it improve?' one facilitator noted that they 'liked the peer assessment element' while another said that it was difficult not to 'teach or instruct' and recommended that training in facilitation skills may be needed for teachers.

As the Easter Camp followed the Bridge21 teamwork model, participants were divided into teams on the first day, and had a team leader assigned to them. This remained the same for the duration of the Camp. However, one facilitator felt that this could have been restricting, and that it may have been useful to allow for greater flexibility in the groups, and make changes if necessary, because 'some groups did not seem to gel as easily as others'. This comment suggests the need for facilitators and teachers to develop skills in managing and supporting students in developing positive team dynamics and resolving conflict within teams.

Some facilitators and observers felt that there could have been more 'student led planning' for both initiatives, while others expressed the view that this would be difficult to implement in practice.

Asked to comment on the integrated approach used in both initiatives, some people felt confident to work with students in this way, perhaps because they had been teachers of practical subjects such as technology or drama, where there is less emphasis perhaps on acquiring content knowledge than in traditional school subjects. One key difference cited was the 'luxury' of longer sessions with participants rather than the usual 40 minute lessons commonly used at post-primary schools, which, it was felt, provided the opportunity for sustained concentration and deeper engagement with an issue or topic being studied. Longer sessions/lessons however, seemed to be a challenge for a few participants, as some observers and facilitators noted.

Facilitators were also positive about the potential for this way of working in a post-primary context, but were also realistic about the limitations, and expressed the view that the success of such an approach would depend on teachers' willingness to plan collaboratively.

Other adjustments would also be needed to support such an approach in a real school context, such as 'creative timetabling' and more flexibility in the learning spaces provided to allow for a team-based approach. It was also noted that the number of participants (18) in the Easter Camp, was much lower than is the norm in an average class at second-level, which made it easier to 'manage' than would normally be the case. One observer cited 'a lack of confidence' among teachers, and 'a fear of losing control of the class' when allowing participants to work more independently than in the traditional, teacher-directed lesson.

The integrated curriculum approach was also commented on, cited as a 'major challenge' in a school system that is currently subject-based and does not allow for many cross-curricular connections between subjects.

A detailed comment on what the participants had learned centred on the large amount of work produced over the few days in each of the initiatives. Focusing on

skills was seen as important, although it was difficult to be sure of how far a participant had improved in a certain skill because they did not know them particularly well. From the participants' own self-assessments, they clearly felt that they had improved in certain key skills areas. It highlighted the need for planning carefully for individual students' needs, so that skills, abilities can be considered, groups can be matched appropriately and participants can be involved in setting their own learning goals.

It was also noted that participants in the Easter project identified several, quite ambitious questions that they wanted to answer. It was difficult to link all the chosen questions and topics to Science for example, as one facilitator noted:

As my activities with the students were dependent on the ideas formulated by them on the first day it was important that I did get the opportunity to work with them for a time ... To facilitate this requires broad advance planning and intensive preparation immediately before any lab-based activities.

One observer commented that it seemed as though more time was needed in the Easter Project to allow groups of participants 'who start off as strangers' to have enough time to get to know each other and complete team tasks successfully.

CONCLUSION

The report has shown that participants in both Easter Camp 2011 and the Easter Project in 2012 found the experiences enjoyable and fun, and that they had developed new knowledge and skills in some areas. The majority of participants in both initiatives indicated that they liked doing projects that linked subjects together, with many agreeing that this would be the best way to learn in Junior Cycle. Their positive comments reveal that whilst they enjoyed the activities, they also felt that their learning benefited from this integrated approach.

Volunteer teachers/facilitators who assisted in the planning and facilitation for the Easter Project 2012 contributed innovative, challenging workshops that participants enjoyed and learnt new skills and knowledge. Programme organisers welcomed the contributions of working group members and volunteer teachers during the Easter Camp and Easter Project. At the Easter Camp the aim was to have one facilitator working with the entire group for specified sessions, however, in practice this was difficult to achieve. At the Easter project, the combination of different guest facilitators for specialist workshops as well as core project facilitators led to participants experiencing several different facilitators and teaching styles, which contributed to a slightly fragmented experience for participants.

There were time limitations for both the Easter Camp and Easter Project, with some activities rushed on the last day, as has been observed. Other limitations identified included the fact that participants came from a variety of schools, and with some exceptions, did not know each other beforehand. They had to get to know each other and work in teams very quickly, which was sometimes challenging for participants and facilitators. Not all teams 'gelled' and though the Bridge21 team leader approach worked quite well in the Easter Camp, the need for more flexibility and change in some groups was noted.

The groups of highly motivated participants for both the Easter camp and Easter project were a bonus for facilitators and co-ordinators alike. But comments have already been noted as to the limitations of this small cohort of participants, with questions posed by observers such as: how realistic would this be in a school?

The theme chosen in advance of the Easter Project was broad enough to allow participants to develop their own interests in topics within the theme. However, participants did not have a say in the choice of the overall theme. Similarly, in the Easter Camp the year before, the theme of Survival had already been decided in advance and activities planned for the Camp programme. Even though teams were able to make other choices within the programme, such as developing a website and deciding on a geographical research area, there was no opportunity for participants to be involved in the planning process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following points are recommendations for future pilot research projects on approaches to integrated curriculum at Junior Cycle:

- To achieve a realistic cohort of participants, it would be useful to pilot future projects with a Junior Cycle class group in a second-level school during the school term rather than in school holidays.
- It would be useful to establish relationships with teachers at a particular school who would be willing to collaborate on an interdisciplinary /cross-curricular project for a longer period – possibly over a school term or part of a term.
- A focus for future projects should be the inclusion of participants in the planning process.
- More planning time would be needed in advance of the project taking place, with clear links between subjects to be made more explicit.
- It would be useful to research combinations of subjects in Junior Cycle that have ‘natural’ links, and develop a list of possible themes, topics, questions, issues and problems to be explored.
- Questions identified by participants have to be carefully managed and kept tightly-focused, with more emphasis on developing higher order questions/issues to be explored, that is, more ‘Why’ questions rather than just ‘What’ questions.
- It would be important to have a defined team of collaborating teachers who would be available to be involved from the planning stage throughout the project duration, to maintain continuity with participants.

- Create more opportunities for participants to work independently within team-based projects, to suit variety of learning styles.
- Facilitators and teachers should develop skills in supporting students to develop positive team dynamics and resolve conflict within teams.

APPENDICES

Appendix A Easter Camp 2011 Plan

Appendix B Easter Project 2012 Plan

Appendix C Easter Camp 2011 Questionnaire

Appendix D Easter Project 2012 Questionnaire

APPENDIX A

EASTER CAMP 2011 PLAN

Second-level Easter Camp Plan 27 – 29 April 2011

Each day will be divided into 3 sessions, with approximate times as follows:

Session One 9.30 – 11am

BREAK

Session Two 11.15 – 12.45pm

LUNCH

Session Three 1.30pm – 3.30pm

Outline Plan of sessions and activities

Day One: Team building, introduction to theme of Survival, making a video

Ice-breakers, group cohesion, winter/desert survival game here, as part of teambuilding, establish groups (4),

Before the Break at 11am, introduce Survival theme for the Camp programme. Explain that all the activities will link to the overall theme, and that each group will have a different/contrasting situation as their starting point, so they will need to make a video (Day 1) research and produce information/survival guides, write a team manifesto, write blogs, have a debate, carry out media interviews (Days 2 and 3).

Lord of the Flies extract or another novel extract or a picture could be used as a stimulus here?

Allow each group to select a card from a selection – each has a different type of scenario, for example:

- Washed up on a pacific island
- Lost in the desert in the middle of Summer
- On a life raft after being shipwrecked
- Mountain expedition goes wrong
- Lost in a forest in Winter

Or, more specific locations could be chosen, for example an island off the coast of Northern Ireland/Scotland? But keeping it more open allows for more imaginative scope, so they can develop the location/time themselves, could adopt a particular historical situation or at least use it in their work.

Groups to decide the following:

- Who they are (they can give themselves roles here)
- Where they are
- What has happened to them
- When this takes place

Once this has been agreed, they need to start working on the video. The video is called: Who We Are, and should also include accounts of their first impressions of where they have found themselves, as well as their thoughts on what they see as their challenges.

This activity should run from approximately 11.30 -12.45pm and from 1.30 - 3pm (2hrs 45).

Groups to present/show their videos, reflection time for each group, and what next for tomorrow (3 – 3.30pm).

Day Two: theme-based activities plus presentations/reflection

1) Now that each group has their own survival situation, they have to find out some information about their environment (including its geographical location, climate, natural resources, vegetation, animal/human population/history) to develop an **information guide** in the form of a **website**. As part of this website, groups also need to include survival tips, so should find out what needs they would have,

depending on their scenario, listing dos and don'ts etc. (This will be developed in Day 2 completed for final presentation on Day 3).

2) Groups will also need to develop their own Manifesto, or set of Rules/Ethos so that they can make decisions, taking into consideration issues such as looking after the environment, ensuring that everyone has a role. As part of this activity, groups will be presented with a number of problems that they have to solve/make quick decisions about, for example, a dog the group has befriended has been eating the food supplies. What should the group do about this problem? The groups can report on their experiences in the form of **Group Blogs**, describing the problems, and discussing their responses.

3) Real-life survival stories can be discussed during the third session of the day, such as the 127 Hours film, where the hiker had to amputate his arm to survive, or in the documentary film Touching the Void, where a mountain climber survived after a fall and being left on the mountain by his companion. Also, the Chilean miners recently and how they made a pact to help each other etc.

Each group to get some info about one of these stories, which they can then tell the other groups about/pose questions about difficult decisions that had to be made etc.

Groups **debate** issues arising from some of these survival stories, for example plane crash in the Andes where people survived because they ate the flesh of dead passengers.

Day Three

Divided into 3 sessions as in Days One and Two

But groups will be working to get their work completed for the final presentation in the afternoon:

- Complete website information/survival guide

- Complete Manifesto
- Group blogs on their experiences, problems faced and how they have overcome them
- Media interviews/reports of their survival (if time allows)
- Exhibition/final presentations

If time allows, a final activity could be the rescue/escape from their scenario, which they can choose - and how this is reported in the media.

Students could devise interviews about what they have experienced, what they have learned about survival in their particular survival situation, and ask questions of each other in role as journalists, looking for a sensational angle for example, or for a more factually based article.

The final presentation (2.30 – 3pm?) could take the form of an exhibition in which each group sets up and displays their work, and also looks at other groups' work.

Reflection and Evaluation time 3 – 3.30pm

APPENDIX B

EASTER CAMP PLAN 2012

Second-level Easter Project April 2012 Adamstown Community College

Main Student Objectives:

1. Students will work in teams to develop and devise their own project tasks based on their own interests using the Disaster theme/related themes
2. Students will collaborate with each other in teams and will participate in some core activities led by teachers (eg scratch programming, podcasts, science, design)
3. Students will complete a range of tasks based on chosen theme and will work towards a presentation of their project work on Friday afternoon

Including *Statements of Learning – NCCA Junior Cycle Framework*

“Statements of learning describe what it is essential to know, understand, value and be able to do as result of their time in Junior Cycle...”

Selected Statements of Learning that are relevant for the Second-level Easter project include the following (based on discussions at planning meeting Tues 3 April):

- 3) creates, appreciates and critically interprets texts (including written, oral, visual and other texts)
- 5) uses mathematical knowledge, reasoning and skills in devising strategies for

investigating and solving problems

11) understands the distribution of social, economic and environmental phenomena

15) uses appropriate technologies in meeting a design challenge

16) applies practical skills as they develop models and products using a variety of materials and technologies

18) brings an idea from conception to realisation

19) uses ICT effectively and ethically in learning and in life

So, translating those into **Aims**:

Students to:

- Communicate effectively using a variety of means
- Create, appreciate and critically interpret texts (written, oral, visual and other)
- Bring an idea from conception to realization
- Use ICT effectively and ethically in learning
- Use mathematical knowledge, reasoning and skills to investigate and solve problems
- Use appropriate technologies to meet a design challenge
- Apply practical skills in developing models and products
- Develop understanding of social, economic and environmental phenomena

Key Skills

Communicating

Communicating my learning

Managing Myself

Learning how to direct my own learning

Knowing myself

Staying Well

Being positive about learning

Being Creative

Implementing ideas and taking action

Working with Others

Co-operating

Contributing

Managing Information and Thinking

Using information to solve problems and create new ideas

Being curious

Reflecting on and evaluating my learning

NB - The key skills also support the development of literacy and numeracy – for example, skills in communication, problem solving, accessing and selecting information will contribute.

More notes from planning meeting

Day One:

Establish criteria for selecting and establishing groups, i.e. gender balance, age range, ICT experience/interest

Project Brief to students:

They need to come up with a project title and a Question they want to find the answer to, e.g.:

KWL –

What you know

What you want to find out

What you have learned

They need to work towards a presentation on the Friday showing evidence of:

Team research

Reflections on learning

Use of some of the new ICT experiences, ie scratch programming, podcasting, reflective logs, video diaries in their presentation

Criteria - Peer Assessment – how well does each team answer the questions they have set themselves?

How interactive and engaging is the presentation?

Are all team members involved?

Self-Assessment – how involved were you in the process/planning phase? How involved in the presentation?

APPENDIX C

EASTER CAMP 2011 QUESTIONNAIRE

Name

School

Overall, how would you rate your experience at the Educate Together 2nd Level Easter Camp?

Excellent

Good

Average

Fair

Poor

Why do you feel this way?

What did you like best?

What did you like least?

Three things I learned about myself & how I learn at the 2nd Level Easter Camp:

1.	
2.	
3.	

4. Has the 2nd Level Easter Camp impacted on you in any of the following ways?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
Improved my ability to work with others					
Developed my research skills					
Increased my confidence using technology					
Allowed me to make new friends					
Improved my communication skills					
Allowed me to be creative					
Helped me learn and explore new topics and information					

5. How well did you work with your team during the 2nd Level Easter Camp?

	Never	Only now & again	Sometimes	Nearly always	Always
I enjoyed working with my team					
I did not contribute to my team's ideas and work					
I trusted my teammates					
I had a clear role to play in my team					
I didn't help my teammates when they needed it					
I got on well with my teammates					
I was bossy with some teammates					
I made a good contribution to my team					
I listened to my teammates' ideas					
I liked working with my team					

6. How important do you think it is to have a team leader?

Very important

Important

Slightly important

Not important

☐☐☐☐

Why do you feel this way?

7. Do you think it would help you learn better in school if you worked as part of a team more often?

Yes

No

Don't know

☐☐☐

Why do you feel this way?

What is the best way to learn in the Junior Cycle, do you think?

Doing projects that link subjects together

☐

Or

Having separate lessons for each subject

☐

Why do you feel this way?

During the Easter Camp you have been assessed on your skills as well as on the quality of work you produced. There has been no formal test or written examination. Do you think that being assessed like this is useful?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Why do you feel this way?

APPENDIX D

EASTER PROJECT 2012 QUESTIONNAIRE

Name

School

1) Overall, how would you rate your experience at the Educate Together 2nd Level Easter Project 2012?

Excellent

Good

Average

Fair

Poor

☐☐☐☐☐

2) What did you like best?

3) What did you like least?

4) Do you agree with the following statement?

“From doing the Easter project, I now have a clearer understanding of how I learn.”

Yes, definitely

Yes, maybe

Not really

Definitely not

☐☐☐☐

5) From the work you did on learning styles and how people interact in groups, can you identify:

a) your preferred learning style(s), and

b) what type of role(s) you usually play in a group:

a) _____

b) _____

5) Has the 2nd Level Easter Project impacted on you in any of the following ways?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
Improved my ability to work with others					
Developed my research skills					
Increased my confidence using ICT					
Helped me to stay focused and on task					
Improved my communication skills					
Allowed me to be creative					
Helped me to understand more about how I learn					
Allowed me to reflect on my learning					

6) How well did you work with your team during the 2nd Level Easter Project?

	Never	Only now & again	Sometimes	Nearly always	Always
I enjoyed working with my team					
I contributed to my team's ideas and work					
I had a clear role to play in my team					
I helped my teammates when they needed it					
I got on well with my teammates					
I was bossy with some teammates					
I made a good contribution to my team					
I listened to my teammates' ideas					
I liked working with my team					

7) Do you think it would help you to learn better in school if you worked as part of a team more often?

Yes, definitely

☐

Yes, maybe

☐

Not really

☐

Not at all

☐

Give reasons for your answer:

8) What is the best way to learn in school, do you think?

Doing projects that link subjects together

Or

Having separate lessons for all subjects

Or

Projects and some separate subjects

Give reasons for your answer.

9) What new knowledge did you learn from the team presentations? Give some examples.

10) How much did you enjoy working on your team's chosen theme/topic?

Very much

Quite a lot

It was ok

Didn't really enjoy it

Give reasons for your answer.

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