

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

**Executive Summary**

**Aim**

The aim of both the Easter Camp 2011 and Easter Project 2012 was to pilot alternative, integrated teaching and learning 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.

The projects have formed part of the Educate Together's research into approaches to integrated curriculum, following the publication of its Second-level Blueprint in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Taking the Next Step, A Blueprint for Educate Together Second-level Schools (2009)

## **Methodology**

- The Easter Camp in 2011 was held in Bridge21's innovative Learning Space, specifically designed for team-based, technology-mediated activities, and took place over three days during a week of the Easter holidays in 2011 with 18 participants.
- The Easter Project 2012 took place at Adamstown Community College, Adamstown, Co Dublin, and took place over four days during a week during the Easter holidays, with a total of 11 participants.
- The Easter Camp 2011 and Easter Project 2012 can be examined as individual case studies within an overall action research cycle.
- Qualitative data obtained from these two initiatives provides valuable insights into how integrated approaches are perceived by students and also by organisers, facilitators and observers.
- A number of data collection tools were selected including reflection sheets, questionnaires, observation protocols, video footage and photographs.
- Data collected via the reflection sheets and questionnaires 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 2011) and the team-based approach to the learning activities.

## **Findings**

- The report shows that participants in both Easter Camp 2011 and the Easter Project 2012 found the experiences enjoyable, and that they felt 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.
- At the Easter Camp 2011 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 2012, 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 them.
- There were time limitations for both the Easter Camp and Easter Project, with some activities perceived as being rushed.
- Other limitations identified included the fact that participants came from a variety of schools and most did not know each other beforehand.
- It was observed that not all teams 'gelled' and though the Bridge21 team leader approach worked quite well in the Easter Camp 2011 the need for more flexibility and change in some groups was noted.

- Participants in both initiatives were highly motivated, but there were small numbers of participants in each, raising questions of how realistic this would be in a real school context.
- It was difficult to actively recruit participants during school holidays for what was essentially a curriculum project, and the need to ‘sell’ the idea of the Camp and Project to potential participants was challenging.
- Themes chosen in advance of both initiatives were broad enough to allow participants to develop their own interests in topic areas within the theme once the initiative began. However, there was little opportunity for participants to be involved in advance planning for either initiative.

### **Recommendations**

- 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 a greater emphasis needs to be placed on developing higher order questions/issues to be explored.

- 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.
- Facilitators / teachers should be encouraged to develop skills in supporting the development of positive team dynamics.
- More opportunities need to be created within projects for participants to work independently, to suit variety of learning styles.