

Scottish Baccalaureate Case Study

St Columba's School, Kilmacolm : Group Interdisciplinary Project

A highly successful Healthy Heart Day highlighted the Scottish Baccalaureate undertaken for the second time at St Columba's School in Kilmacolm.

An-eight strong group of pupils studying Advanced High Biology were involved in all aspects of the interdisciplinary project with each pupil assigned a clearly defined role.

The group decided they wanted to stage a health convention aimed at the whole school community of pupils, teaching staff and non-teaching staff.

Gradually, it evolved into a Healthy Heart Day, in the run-up to Valentine's Day 2011, with the focus on a healthy emotional and physical heart.

From the outset it was made clear that it was a group project and this meant that staying on board for the duration of the project was essential.

As a result pupils, their teacher and rector signed a partnership agreement making a commitment to see the project through to its conclusion and emphasising the investment the school had made.

It was also agreed that each of the eight pupils had an individual role to play in preparation for the special February 11 event and, interestingly, individual projects arose within the umbrella of the bigger group project and these added significantly to the Healthy Heart Day.

With enthusiasm, pupils researched their particular related topic, seeking outside expertise to consult and target their specific audience within the school community.

One pupil looked in depth at the respiratory system – smoking, lung disease, the effects of smoking on the cardiovascular system. She completed surveys of fellow pupils, targeting S1 and S2, to gauge their attitudes to smoking.

She devised interactive activities for pupils to engage in the Healthy Heart Day, displayed the results of her findings on a colourful display board and held discussions within social education lessons.

Another pupil looked at invasive heart treatments and the technologies involved, such as the use of heart valves, while another group member studied non-invasive treatments, hypertension and effect of life style.

Also put under the pupils' Baccalaureate microscopes were subjects such as

stress and sleep patterns in pupils; work-related stress, sleep patterns, economics of days lost, and attitudes to adult stress and depression.

The Baccalaureate pupils' intensive investigations also covered issues of nutrition, bulimia, anorexia, exercise, extra curricular activities as well as dental care, cosmetic influences and self-esteem.

On top of this, each pupil had an administrative role that was decided upon by the pupils at their weekly meeting. For example, one pupil was responsible for liaising with the rector and another for acquiring display boards for the day.

One pupil arranged to meet with teachers to find out what related topics they may be teaching that day, and another contacted the British Heart Foundation to get promotional literature. Group members also arranged a full charity day on the day of the event – pupils wore red to highlight its “heart” aspect and helium, heart-shaped balloons were delivered.

“The day was without a doubt a great success, a real tribute to the pupils' determination and hard work,” said Patricia Nicoll, head of biology and psychology at St Columba's.

“The pupils knew that they would be assessed individually. Three gained Grade A, one Grade B, two gained grade C, and two were unsuccessful. The main reason for the unsuccessful grades was the fact that these pupils did not take their learning beyond a mere internet research, there was no effort to go out and meet with experts in the fields that they researched.

All in all it was an interesting and enlightening project with a very good event at the end of it.”

General Information on Baccalaureate Group Projects.

Baccalaureate candidates can choose to do a group project but they are advised to think very carefully about this before starting. Far from being an ‘easy option’ group projects are extremely demanding and require very careful planning. On the positive side group projects allow candidates to work on a project with a broader scope than an individual project, they encourage the team building and collaborative working which are so valued in Higher and Further Education and the workplace. However, their success does depend on the full commitment of all group members as well as the dynamic of the group. It might be worth considering the following questions before deciding on a group project:

- Are all members team players, who are enthusiastic about working with others in a collaborative way?
- Have all group members had a say in the choice of project theme?

-Is the project theme sufficiently broad in scope to provide each group member with a fulfilling role and the opportunity to develop the required skills?
-If a member of the group dropped out would the project be able to continue with those left?

Having considered all of the above and decided on a group project, each member of the group must establish and define a clear individual role in the project. Templates for the five stages of the project must be completed by and be individual to each member of the group.

In the Proposal clear information must be given about the individual's role and about his/her contribution to group work. There should also be an individual skills analysis (this will be different for each member of the group) and a clear account of how the project will allow development/strengthening of the required skills.

The Plan should be detailed and will focus on the group member in terms work to be undertaken both individually and collaboratively. A timeline is compulsory and must include all individual and collaborative elements.

The Presentation of the project may be done as a group but each member of the group must contribute to the preparation and final presentation. Details should be included in the Presentation template.

The evaluation of the project and self-evaluation are from the individual perspective but will include information on the challenges/benefits/difficulties of working as part of a group. This experience will be different for each individual. For the self-evaluation candidates are advised to go back to the skills analysis carried out at the Proposal stage, to look at the reflective diary/log/blog, which they have kept since the beginning of the project, and to consider to what extent these skills have been developed/strengthened giving concrete examples from the work they have undertaken and the experience they have had.

As can be seen from the St Columba's case study, group members will be assessed individually based on their own performance, contribution to the project, independent working and skills development.