

Thoughts on SciFest

Jennifer Dixon



A reflective look over the last three years with teams from St David's CBS, Artane.

My name is Jennifer Dixon and I teach science and maths in St David's CBS, Artane. There has always been an enthusiasm for science in St David's but participating in SciFest has added a new and exciting dimension to this enthusiasm, the confidence to go outside the school and compete in competitions such as SciFest and the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition. In just three years participation in SciFest has grown in the school from just one team (3 students) in 2009 to fifteen teams (40 students) in 2011. The students exhibiting range in age from first year to sixth year.

An outstanding example of what can be achieved is the story of three students who are currently in sixth year, **Shane Boylan, Carl Burke and Cathal Fagan**. Three years ago, while in third year these energetic students bounced into my lab saying they had an idea and that they would like to enter SciFest. They presented judges in DIT with ducks, a maze and findings supporting ducks possessing a memory and received a highly commended certificate for their work. This encouraged them to return the following year. This time they were determined to compete at a higher level, after being immersed among the best of the best at the previous event. They now knew what was required and delivered an amazing project. All of a sudden they had become confident and articulate in communicating in the language of science and presenting findings to judges and self reflecting upon tasks and performances. It was amazing to see this growth in such a short space of time. They were awarded INTEL project of the year 2011 at DIT Kevin Street for their research extension into correlating brain size to memory function in rodents and linking it with Alzheimer's disease treatments. They were also placed first in the senior biology category. It was an amazing day.

Having been given the opportunity and stage to taste success and believing now even more so in their ideas, their research and their abilities they were delighted to be put forward to go to INTEL HQ in Leixlip to compete against the other Intel Best Project Award winners from each of the ITs and the University of Ulster in Derry. They were now just one stage away from going to represent Ireland and SciFest at the World Finals Stage in the US, the International Science and Engineering Fair. Although they didn't win this award they did win the esteem of parents, grandparents, the school principal and of me, their teacher. I was proud of the journey I had the pleasure of witnessing. They now show great potential and have attracted quite a bit of media attention at local and national level.

Shane, Carl and Cathal exemplify what participating in SciFest has meant for St David's. Other teams also rose to the challenge, and received 'highly commended', and showing that science not just for the few but for all. They became more confident in their abilities and appreciated every second of the process. This increase in confidence has also led to greater participation of students from St David's in the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition.

Thanks to SciFest, enthusiasm for science in St David's, has grown and grown. At this time each year another cohort of eager junior students will team up and explode into my lab with levels of enthusiasm for scientific research beyond words! It's fantastic to see. With a few carefully chosen and posed questions their own ideas and interests can be moulded into a hypothesis that is fit to test. They have now begun their individual and team journey to being articulate in the field of science and scientific thinking.



It is the inclusiveness of SciFest and the encouragement of all participants that sets SciFest apart. It recognises how important it is to build a rapport with students across a diverse range of backgrounds. SciFest also puts great emphasis on **positive encouragement** and it is a really lovely accessible day out, a great resource which should be supported.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank **Sheila Porter**, herself a science teacher who set up SciFest and now manages the project. Thank you, Sheila and SciFest, from Jennifer Dixon and all of the SciFest participants in St David's. It has been an amazing journey to date.

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SciFest@DIT 2010 participants Ryan Rossiter, Aaron Foster, Nathan O'Connell, and Glen Fagan from St David's CBS, Artane with Sheila Porter (SciFest Project Manager) and Jennifer Dixon (Science Teacher)