

## SCHOOLS FOR RESILIENCE: RECONNECTING SCHOOLS WITH THEIR COMMUNITY

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Field Studies Council has been working with five other partner organisations on a European-funded project that aims to create more resilient communities. This short article reports on the progress and highlights some of the benefits for schools and pupils involved in the UK pilot project.

### INTRODUCTION: RESILIENCE AND VALUES

As part of a European-funded project, the Field Studies Council has been working with five other partner organisations from Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Basque Country in Spain and Denmark on a project that aims to create more resilient communities – resilience being the ability to adapt and rebound from shocks and traumas to survive and thrive. It is a concept that most are comfortable with on a personal basis but applying it to communities may be one of the key competencies we need to develop in order to thrive under the future (and current) effects of climate change. For example, how communities deal with flooding events and even economic shocks of the future.

Our primary role as a partner organisation was to develop a methodology that would underpin the project and give structure to the sessions that were being developed by the Danish team. Secondly we had to conduct pilot projects with local secondary schools to test whether our proposals worked and to inform the final output of the project - a set of teaching resources and guides on how to adapt the project in different settings.

The school that undertook our pilot study was Pencoed Comprehensive, a school of approximately 1,200 pupils (including 6<sup>th</sup> form) situated between Cardiff and Swansea. The project was run within the school's 'eco team' on a voluntary basis for 4 months, totalling roughly 26 hours of time. Part of the pilot was to experiment with methods of delivery and each partner country approached this in different ways including delivering distinct lessons, integrating into current lessons and our approach within a voluntary group. The pedagogy of the project was centred around a place-based learning approach whereby students are learning in, about and for their community, or place.

The start of the project aimed to get the students recognising that they were a key part of their community and therefore needed to be involved in making decisions about how to cope with the future shocks. Building on much of the good work that the FSC has been doing regarding a values-based approach to education, the students considered their personal values and what values they felt would be most important for a resilient community. This activity formed the foundation of the project and created a constitution that allowed students a check when unsure if we were promoting the values they had identified.

### THE COMMUNITY

Once we had finished looking at ourselves, we expanded our view out to the community that surrounds the school. The students walked around town and mapped the themes of waste, food, mobility and energy using iPads and GPS Log. Returning to school they then analysed areas of strength and weakness within their community so that they could plan and implement an action that would improve the resilience of their town. Mobility was identified as a major strength as Pencoed, being a commuter town, has a diverse public and private transport system with a train station and good access to road networks. Students also noted that there was a diverse food network of local and non-local producers. The area of weakness identified was waste as there was a lot of litter around Pencoed. The students felt that they could put on a community event to help address this issue and build better connections between locals, something which they also thought was lacking.

### THE STUDENTS PROJECT

With this in mind, the students set about organising an event to clean a local river. We talked a lot about why we were doing this project and the students understood that cleaning the river was not promoting resilience (as people would just litter it again). We held discussions around behaviour change and used the values activity to think about how we could bring about this change. The students realised that, if they wanted to keep their river clean, they would need to get people to care more about their environment which should then bring about the behaviour change desired. To do this a survey of life in the river was added to the event in order to celebrate the life that was within the water and surrounding area.



It was made clear from the beginning that the students were in charge and that it was their project so they had to organise between themselves all of the logistics for the day. This included: getting physical materials, creating posters, contacting stakeholders and organising a time and date. It was really impressive to see how students undertook this challenge and how empowered they were by it. This level of responsibility was not something that they had been exposed to before and they found it really challenging. However, once they realised that they could ask the likes of their teachers, parents, etc. to help them and share the load, it became a much more manageable project. It also acted as a useful discussion point on how diverse connections with others could create a more resilient community.

The day itself was a success and the students managed to get some key stakeholders from their community along to help. The manager of the local supermarket and one of their employees turned-up as well as an ex-member of the Green Party, parents and grandparents and even the local MP who has influence on policy for both education and environment. Initially, students were a little disappointed as they wanted more people to come along, but once they realised the impact that these few people could have, they were much happier. In total, the project collected 20 black bags of rubbish from a 200 m stretch of river, including several push chairs, a printer, a computer, a strimmer and even a pink spotty dressing gown. Alongside this, the students identified over 15 species of fish and invertebrates that were recorded and shared with the attendees.

### THE NEXT STEPS

From this event links have been made with people in the community who have been doing local events such as litter picking for many years and with whom the school and pupils now have a connection. It is these small connections that could prove to be the initial sparks from which more resilient communities are born. The challenge now is to build on this momentum and the school will be attending a reflection event at Margam Discovery Centre to help define the next steps.

There will be a training event for teachers or community groups wanting to take part in the project held in Cloughjordan Eco Village in October 2016, details of which will soon be posted onto the project website.

The project materials in full will be available by the end of 2016 on the project website;  
<http://schools-for-resilience.eu/>  
or if you would like more information then feel free to contact one of the UK project managers:  
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