

Baboró BEAST!

The Ireland Funds are helping science, technology, engineering, art and math meet in the classroom.



Q

- When does a lesson on biodiversity... result in a 3D art installation made of felt?
- How do squishy blue bubbles in a plastic cup... teach children about seaweed as an alternate fuel?
- When does learning about carbon dioxide and its effect on ocean acidification...turn into a poem?

A

When the Baboró BEAST! program comes into your classroom.

Since 1997

, the much-acclaimed Baboró International Arts Festival has been known for bringing creative art experiences to children through their weeklong Galway event held every October. In 2012, Baboró expanded its reach and began an ambitious project beyond the Festival: engaging with 8 scientists, 6 artists, 8 teachers and 200 students in 8 primary schools in Galway city and county. Their objective was not only to bring more science exposure to children, but to do it while combining Technology, Engineering, Maths and the Arts.

And so, The Baboró Environment, Arts, Science and Technology project—or BEAST! as it is now known—began. **With funding from The Ireland Funds Promising Ireland Campaign Grant Round, this project is now in its second year of bringing scientists and artists from the local community into the classrooms of Galway.** “That experience is breaking down the silos in our community and making science creative and fun for these kids,” explains Teenagh Cunningham, General Manager of the Baboró International Arts Festival. “One of the hallmarks is that this is not a ‘hit and run’ program where we come in for a single session. Instead, the children do multiple sessions with visiting scientists all from the Ryan Institute and the National University of Ireland, Galway.”

And it isn’t just the children who benefit. Teachers participate in the workshops, to inspire them to use the arts and creativity in the classroom. “I couldn’t believe they were linking science and the arts but I was convinced I could learn something,” says Geraldine De Paor, a teacher at the Uachtar Ard Primary School. “I can actually say my whole outlook on the teaching of science has changed.”

For the scientists it’s a refreshing way to look at their own research. How do you teach a group of 12 year olds about bacteria? How can you get them excited about using seaweed for fuel? It pushes the scientists to distill their content into basic and exciting lessons for the children. And

for the children it removes the stereotype of a scientist in a white lab coat conducting incomprehensible experiments. Lessons on biodiversity started in the classroom and continued with a trip to a fish hatchery in Connemara. Then, a textile artist came to the classroom to work with the students, who wanted to create a felt wall hanging and 3D models of fish. Best of all, becoming familiar with a scientist or an artist can be an inspiring thing for children. The scientists bring the children to their labs on the college campus with the aim of getting them excited about third-level education through that early familiarity.

“The feedback we’re getting is tremendous,” says Teenagh. **“We polled parents, teachers, scientists and children last year and found 99% of the feedback was positive. Baboró has always tried to impact children in a positive way.** Some of the positive outcomes we’re seeing include increased engagement; children who don’t always participate are interested and excited. Teachers have reported an increase in teamwork, including teamwork between children of different backgrounds who may not have interacted before. All of those things you have to develop as a young person to succeed.”

Teenagh shares how The Ireland Funds have been an integral part of the young program. **“We approached The Ireland Funds about supporting us because it was such a good fit with what The Ireland Funds do: it’s about access, education, developing the whole child to their whole potential.** Funding from The Ireland Funds has been one thing, but it has also helped us showcase what we do. The international network that is The Ireland Funds and the massive interest in them is phenomenal. For us, to be able to show the impact that The Ireland Funds can have on a program like this, is just brilliant.”

The best impact may be summed up by Katie, a child involved in the Baboró BEAST! program. When asked “How come you’re happy today?” She simply replied, “Today is Monday, it’s science. Science is really art in a scientific way.”

