

# Graphic Novel

## Project Evaluation

October 2010 – May 2011



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## PROJECT BACKGROUND

*“In a world where competency in multiple literacies is considered important and people need to be skilled readers of images and texts that combine in a range of ways, comics offer an effective way of developing the ability to read both words and pictures, as well as grammar of the comic itself (through page layout and the use of speech balloons, for instance). In essence, comics offer both the joy of reading [or writing] for pleasure and a thorough understanding of how complex texts drawing on a range of literacies work and are so important for several reasons” (Gibson 2010: 21).*

*Drawn Together* was a collaborative project between Transition Year students in Firhouse Community College and in Coláiste Bríde, who were mentored by the following artists:

- Story teller and writer Larry O’Loughlin
- Drama practitioner Stephen Jones
- Animator, illustrator, and graphic artist Maeve Clancy.

Students worked together in each school and developed the stories and the visuals for the two graphic art stories, entitled *Madison’s Story* and *Eugene or Anto*, presented in the book *Drawn Together*. In total 43 students took part in the project. Both TY Classes that participated were attending dedicated art classes.

Students first worked with a story teller and then a drama practitioner on the development of a story idea and then the dialogue to go with it. Afterwards, the students worked with the graphic artist on the visual design and layout of the story. The drama practitioner facilitated a session during this period in order to further assist with the creation of dialogue. At the close of the project, the finished stories were published in a book that was presented to the students at a public event held in Tallaght Library and hosted by the Mayor of South Dublin County.

The project was facilitated via the NOISE South Dublin Artist in Residence scheme and supported through partnership with South Dublin Libraries and RUA RED, South Dublin Arts Centre. NOISE South Dublin ([www.noisesouthdublin.com](http://www.noisesouthdublin.com)) is a website initiated by South Dublin County Council’s Arts Office and inspired by the Australia Council’s NOISE site, that celebrates the creativity of young people, ages 13 to 25, who reside or study in the County. NOISE South Dublin showcases work created by young people—film, visual arts, dance, music and more—and provides a space to develop creative interests and practice through collaboration with and facilitation from a NOISE Project Artist.

The original idea to develop a comic art or graphic novel project came from the initiation of RUA RED, South Dublin Arts Centre. The Centre had an interest in bringing well-known international artists, the Kartoon Kings, to South Dublin County for an exhibition and series of art-making workshops with young people. While this idea has

not yet been carried out, South Dublin County Council's Arts Office, through its NOISE South Dublin programme and South Dublin Libraries came together in partnership with RUA RED to develop this project on a local level. Artists located within Dublin were approached for the project with the eventual long-term aims and objectives listed below in mind.

## Aims and Objectives

**Project Aim:** to develop a project that provides an opportunity for students to learn from professional artists and engage in a literacy project

### Project Objectives:

- Introduce young people to working with professional artists
- Develop critical and visual language skills among young people
- Promote an interest in visual arts among young people in the County
- Demystify young people's impressions of an art centre through a hands-on experience working with a professional visual artist
- Promote literacy, including visual literacy skills
- Engage young people in reading through the use of comics
- Engage young people in storytelling through the use of comics
- To assist students who are in their Transition Year (TY) with exploring and trying new things
- To help TY students access resources outside of the school
- To help TY students link and meet with working artists
- To assist students in expressing themselves
- To assist students in learning about structuring stories
- To engage students in making a contemporary piece of art based on ideas, activities and everyday experiences familiar to them

Early discussions about the project included the possibility that students might create books for primary school age children to pass on the experience to younger students, illustrating to younger students the potential of what they might achieve once reaching secondary school as well as giving something back to the community. This possibility changed over time as a result of stories developed by the students and how reflective they were of issues important to them and their age group.



*Students learn about the graphic novels collection in Tallaght Library, October 2010*

# EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Monitoring and evaluation of *Drawn Together* was carried out by South Dublin County Council's Youth Arts Coordinator.

## Evaluation Aims

To assess:

- Students overall experience within the project
- The impact of the project on students' awareness and attendance of RUA RED, South Dublin Arts Centre and South Dublin County's Libraries, particularly Tallaght Library
- The impact of the project on students' engagement with reading, specifically in relation to graphic novels
- The impact of the project on students' visual literacy
- The impact of the project on students' awareness of career development in the arts, particularly through working with professional artists
- The impact of the project on students' understanding of the links between artistic disciplines
- The impact of the project on teachers' own professional development and curriculum delivery in Transition Year
- The impact of the project on building awareness of community resources for schools and young people
- The structure for partnership working between the organisations / departments involved

## Methodology

- Observation of sessions in each school; with at least one focusing on story telling and one focusing on visual arts
  - November 1, 2010, Firhouse Community College
  - November 15, 2010, Coláiste Bríde
  - January 24, 2011, Coláiste Bríde
  - March 8, 2011, Firhouse Community College
  - March 14, 2011, Coláiste Bríde

- Pre-, mid-, and post- project questionnaires for students

School	Participant Numbers	No. of Questionnaires Returned	Time of Questionnaire
Coláiste Brídee	23	6	Pre / early project, October 2010
Firhouse Community College	20	14	Pre / early project, October 2010
Firhouse community College	20	2	December 2010
Firhouse Community College	20	13	Mid project, March 2011
Firhouse Community College	20	15	Post project, May 2011

- Pre-, mid- and post project questionnaires and / or discussions with teachers involved
- Pre-, mid- and post project questionnaires and / or discussions with creative writing and graphic artists involved
- Due to different arrangements with Coláiste Bríde, a focus group with students was held at the close of the project in order to gather feedback. During this focus group students were asked to work in groups to develop a storyboard describing how the project progressed and what they learned, enjoyed, found challenging, etc... over time. 18 students out of 23 took part in this focus group.
- Attendance and observation of the graphic novel launch event
- Post project questionnaires to partners involved in development of project.

In addition, students shared experiences of the project at the launch event held in May 2011.

In addition, analysis of evaluation findings includes investigation of the way in which the organisations involved may be able to work together in the future as well as how the project may have or may not have contributed to audience development for both RUA RED and Tallaght Library.

# PROJECT DELIVERY

## Planning meetings

Planning meetings took place from April / May 2010. These meetings involved partners from NOISE South Dublin / South Dublin County Council's Arts Office; South Dublin County's Library Services; and RUA RED, South Dublin Arts Centre along with artists Larry O'Loughlin and Maeve Clancy.



*Writing session with Larry O'Loughlin*

Initial planning meetings focused on establishing project aims and objectives for the organisations involved. Schools were selected for participation based on interest and similar aims and objectives for learning.

Teachers were involved in planning meetings for their individual schools and were kept up-to-date on the programme occurring within the partner school.

A project timetable was established coupled with descriptions of facilitation techniques for each art form involved.

## Roles

Roles for partner organisations, teachers and artists are described below.

**Creative Writing Facilitator:** assist students with developing their stories; provide students with techniques for story generation; lead on the literacy aspects of the project for young people

**Drama Facilitator:** assist students in actualising their stories through drama

**Comic Art Facilitator:** assist students with visualising their stories; lead on the creative development and skill building in visual aspects of project for young people; give deadlines for work; assist with delivering the final publication

**Teachers:** aid to the artists facilitating project; provide materials needed; support participation; assist with clean up and prep for sessions; attendance; student welfare. One teacher from Firhouse Community College who taught art to Transition Year students supported the project, while in Coláiste Bríde, the art teacher from the school initiated the project, and then passed it on to a cover teacher for support as she was on maternity leave.

**Students:** to engage in learning from artists involved and create stories and visuals for the development of a comic art story to be presented in a publication

**RUA RED:** provide facilities and advice regarding facilities

**South Dublin County Council Arts Office:** project management and coordination; conduct monitoring and evaluation; school participation

**South Dublin Libraries:** project liaison; assist with linking with graphic novel collection; school participation; support with library facilities and creation and funding of publication

## Facilities

**The County Library, Tallaght,** which reopened in April 2008 following a major refurbishment programme, is in the heart of the cultural quarter of the Tallaght Town Centre, which includes the Civic Theatre, the Big Picture and RUA RED, South Dublin Arts Centre. The Library is located adjacent to the Square Shopping Centre and at the terminus of the Luas Red Line. The library provides a wide range of stock in a variety of formats including large print books, talking books on CD and online access to its download zone. The library provides a large and up-to-date book stock, free state-of-the-art computer facilities, self service terminals, printing and photocopying systems, a digital training and a conference suite, a teen zone, a children's library and a local studies area and assistive technologies for people who have visual or reading difficulties. The multi award winning County Library is now included in a European database for inspirational libraries.

**The Download Zone,** is facilitated by all of South Dublin Library Services and is an online portal from which users can download audio books directly to their mp3 player or iPod from the Library's on-line service.

The service includes a large collection of downloadable graphic novels, which facilitators, teachers and students were encouraged to access during the project.

**RUA RED, South Dublin Arts Centre** opened in February 2009 and is a home for all types of art at all levels with a mixture of professional and community programming, workshops and tenants. RUA RED also manages an artistic programme that aims to reach, inspire, teach and engage audiences of all ages and stages from across South Dublin County and beyond. They also hire any of their facilities for personal use, group events or classes.

**NOISE South Dublin** ([www.noisesouthdublin.com](http://www.noisesouthdublin.com)) is a website initiated by South Dublin County Council's Arts Office and inspired by the Australia Council's NOISE site, that celebrates the creativity of young people, ages 13 to 25, who reside or study in the County. NOISE South Dublin showcases work created by young people—film, visual arts,

dance, music and more—and provides a space to develop creative interests and practice through collaboration with and facilitation from a NOISE Project Artist.

During the course of the project students were encourage to post their work-in-progress to the NOISE Projects page so that students in each school could see how work was developing.

## **Art form Facilitation**

### **Overall Creative Writing Facilitation:**

Utilising a series of creative writing exercises, Larry O’Loughlin worked with students to produce a piece of creative/ original writing in each session. Each piece created in sessions 1-3 was an independent piece, not directly related to the final piece which would / might be carried forward to the work with artist Maeve Clancy. However, the techniques utilised and skills acquired were an integral part of the learning process which facilitated the creation of a final written story in sessions four and five.

Students were taught different story development techniques involving establishing themes and then addressing the who, what, where, why, when, and how...as well as designing small picture books.

### **Drama Facilitation:**

Drama facilitator Stephen Jones joined the students in each school in their final sessions of writing with Larry O’Loughlin. This assisted the students in working out how their stories might be carried through via dialogue and action. These activities were very applicable to the visualisation of the story for a comic / graphic style. As a result, Stephen also joined the students in each school at the comic / graphic art stage at a later date to review and assist with creating visual elements for the stories.

### **Comic / Graphic Art Facilitation:**

Artist Maeve Clancy worked with students on visualising their stories for presentation in a graphic novel. Over a period of ten weeks, she instructed students on character designs and the importance of perspective, especially in relation to presenting text of the story in the order in which a reader should encounter it. Further, she worked with students in RUA RED’s Mac Lab facility, teaching them how to scan and finish off the lines and colouring of their comic drawings on Adobe Photoshop. Either individual students or teams of students created different images for different aspects of the story. With these individualised representations of characters at different points in the story, students were required to work together on creating visual cohesion for the whole of the story. An outline of the lesson plan over the ten weeks appears on the next page.

### **Artistic Facilitation from teachers:**



Teachers from each school were directly involved in supporting the overall project. The teacher from Firhouse Community College worked with students in order to assist in facilitating the visualisation of stories and apply learning gained from Maeve's lessons by asking them to develop comic strips based on the life of an artist. Students were encouraged to research the lives of well-known artists from history and add humour to the subject. Students not only demonstrated learning gained about these figures from history, but also in applying and presenting this learning in a visual and comic-focused manner.

In addition, the teacher from Coláiste Bríde, asked students to keep diaries of the work carried out throughout the year. For these diaries, the teacher provided topics for students to address, which included looking at graphic novels, doing sketches and recording story ideas.



*Comic Drawings done during the project*

## Comic Art Lesson Plans

Week	Activity
1	Introduction to Maeve's Work Look at a selection of Graphic Novels Character Design lesson
2	Students show their Character Designs Look at them as a group, discuss and improve Look at Layouts and Backgrounds
3	Students bring in images/drawings/paintings for backgrounds Work on those in variety of media
4	Start to apply visuals to the story, working in comic strip format, looking at telling stories in panels and with speech bubbles
5	Students bring in one finished comic strip. Look at and discuss. Work out as a group who will do what on the finished comic. Division of roles and labour.
6	Each student working on their section of the book
7	Each student working on their section of the book
8	Mac Day at Rua Red: learning about scanning artwork, inputting photos, digital paint, lettering, leveling and image manipulation
9	Mac Day 2 at Rua Red: working on their comics to add speech bubbles/text/colour, finishing elements
10	Final tweaks, changes and collection of finished work

A copy of the project timetable for delivery in each school is below.



Weekday	Date	Time	Location	Activity	Facilitator	Teacher
Monday	15/11/2010	9.45am-11am	<b>Firhouse Community College @ COUNTY LIBRARY</b>	<p><b>Three Triangles:</b> Utilizing this technique students will acquire the skills necessary to produce a story outline/ scenario in under five minutes.</p> <p>Unlike the Four Squares methods which works on the objective/ obstacle approach to story creation, the Three Triangles introduces students to the notion of story Theme as technique.</p> <p>Students will utilise this technique to establish a number of collective scenarios/storylimes. Typically, themes chosen will be Revenge, Betrayal/venge, and Envy, although others can emerge. Stories will be contemporary , although fantasy elements may occur during the creative process.</p> <p>Via this technique students will also be introduced to the Sting In The Tale or O'Henry technique.</p> <p><b>HOMEWORK:</b> students will be invited to create a piece for the following session.</p>	Larry O'Loughlin	<p>Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Brídee</p> <p>Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community Schoo</p>
		2:20 – 3:30pm	<b>Coláiste Brídee, Clondalkin</b>			

Weekday	Date	Time	Location	Activity	Facilitator	Teacher
Monday	22/11/2010	9.45am-11am  2:20 – 3:30pm	<b>Firhouse Community College @ COUNTY LIBRARY TALLAGHT</b>  <b>Coláiste Brídee, Clondalkin</b>	<b>Character:</b> Students will be introduced to the notion of character as the driving force behind the story. We will also look at character consistec and as they affect/dictate story line. In this class we will create a number of characters, give them a biography, certain character traits, and then , utilising the What If technique of story creation, create scenarios to walk them through to establish realistic, viable reaction paths.  <b>HOMEWORK:</b> students invited to create character biography and scenarios, and short complete piece for the following week.	Larry O'Loughlin	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Brídee  Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School
Monday	29/11/2010	9.45-11am  2:20 – 3:30pm	<b>Firhouse Community College @ COUNTY LIBRARY TALLAGHT</b>  <b>Coláiste Brídee, Clondalkin</b>	<b>Our Story:</b> Utilising all the techniques and skills acquired above students will create a piece of writing which may be carried forward for use with Maeve. It is intended that this will be z contemporary pieced based around their own realities. This piece will be written initially as story, but utilising drama skills to drive the story development. It is intended this piece will be completed in class. The story board will also be introduced in this session as an aid to structure.	Larry O'Loughlin	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Brídee  Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School
Monday	6/12/2010	9.45am-11am  2:20 – 3:30pm	<b>Firhouse Community College</b>  <b>Coláiste Brídee, Clondalkin</b>	<b>Drama:</b> Utilising the piece created above, pupils will now create an original fifteen minute drama. This drama piece may now be carried forward to their work with Maeve as both story and structure, to form the base of the Graphic Novel.	Larry O'Loughlin and Stephen Jones	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Brídee  Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School
BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK

<b>Weekday</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Facilitator</b>	<b>Teacher</b>
Monday	10/1/2011	2:20 – 3:30pm	Coláiste Bríde, Clondalkin	Introduction to Maeve's Work Look at a selection of Graphic Novels Character Design lesson	Maeve Clancy	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Bríde
Tuesday	11/1/2011	2.40-4.00pm	Firhouse Community College	(Luke may attend on this day)		Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School
Monday	17/1/2011	2:20 – 3:30pm	Coláiste Bríde, Clondalkin	Students show their Character Designs Look at them as a group, discuss and improve Look at Layouts and Backgrounds	Maeve Clancy	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Bríde
Tuesday	18/1/2011	2.40-4.00pm	Firhouse Community College			Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School
Monday	24/1/2011	2:20 – 3:30pm	Coláiste Bríde, Clondalkin	Students bring in images/drawings/paintings for backgrounds Work on those in variety of media	Maeve Clancy	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Bríde
Tuesday	25/1/2011	2.40-4.00pm	Firhouse Community College			Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School
Monday	31/1/2011	2:20 – 3:30pm	Coláiste Bríde, Clondalkin	Start to apply visuals to the story, working in comic strip format, looking at telling stories in panels and with speech bubbles	Maeve Clancy	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Bríde
Tuesday	1/2/2011	2.40-4.00pm	Firhouse Community College			Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School
Monday	7/2/2011	2:20 – 3:30pm	Coláiste Bríde, Clondalkin	Students bring in one finished comic strip. Look at and discuss. Work out as a group who will do what on the finished comic. Division of roles and labour.	Maeve Clancy	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Bríde
Tuesday	8/2/2011	2.40-4.00pm	Firhouse Community College			Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School
Monday	14/2/2011	2:20 – 3:30pm	Coláiste Bríde, Clondalkin	Each student working on their section of the book	Maeve Clancy	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Bríde
Tuesday	15/2/2011	2.40-4.00pm	Firhouse Community College			Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School

<b>Weekday</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Facilitator</b>	<b>Teacher</b>
BREAK	21/2/2011 22/2/2011	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
Monday	28/2/2011	2:20 – 3:30pm	Coláiste Brídee, Clondalkin	Each student working on their section of the book	Maeve Clancy	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Brídee
Tuesday	1/3/2011	2.40- 4.00pm	Firhouse Community College			Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School
Monday	7/3/2011	2:20 – 3:30pm	RUA RED (CB)	Mac Day at Rua Red: learning about scanning artwork, inputting photos, digital paint, lettering, leveling and image Manipulation	Maeve Clancy	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Brídee
Tuesday	3/8/2011	2.40- 4.00pm	RUA RED (FH)			Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School
Monday	14/3/2011	2:20 – 3:30pm	RUA RED (CB)	Mac Day 2 at Rua Red: working on their comics to add speech bubbles/text/colour, finishing elements	Maeve Clancy	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Brídee
Tuesday	15/3/2011	2.40- 4.00pm	RUA RED (FH)			Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School
Monday	21/3/2011	2:20 – 3:30pm	Coláiste Brídee or RUA RED, tbd	Final tweaks, changes and collection of finished work	Maeve Clancy	Stephanie Barcoe from Coláiste Brídee
Tuesday	22/3/2011	2.40- 4.00pm	RUA RED (FH)			Sarah Cunningham from Firhouse Community School

# FINDINGS

## Student Experience

### Expectations

Students in Coláiste Bríde explained what they were most looking forward to at the start of the project. Most common were areas related to drawing, and creating characters, a story and a book:

- “doing something new, making a project together with my class and making my own comic book and showing it out”
- “I’m looking forward to working with Larry and Maeve and I’m excited to see the finished project”
- “drawing comics”
- “I’m really looking forward to the art side of it and creating my own character”
- “doing story books”
- “drawing characters for the comic because I love drawing”

*“I got to learn more computer skills and I got to learn how to use the apple computer and also photoshop and learn how to put our comic altogether. We got to work on our art and writing skills which was fun. We got to explore RUA RED and the library which was interesting. It was rewarding to have made our own comic and to work as a team”*

Student

Students in Firhouse Community College had similar opinions, also highlighting drawing and visual art as well as the creation of a book as the most exciting aspects of the project:

- Draw
- Graphic design, drawing writing
- Drawing and writing the comic
- Drawing the cartoons
- A comic book that I have made myself
- “I’m looking forward to making picture books and our books being published”
- As much as I can do really and draw
- “Creating a short picture book, meeting writers and artists”
- “to develop my imagination because I’m not good at creating things”
- “being able to write a graphic novel because I want to improve my art work and writing skills”
- “creative writing techniques because I find it helpful”
- “getting our comics published”
- “be able to write and draw picture for a comic book properly”
- “making a children’s picture book because it si something different and it will make a good experience”



Initial comments by students in Firhouse Community School indicate that students were under the impression that they would be making a picture book for primary school students. As mentioned previously, this was a possibility for the project, but the stories that developed over time were so expressive of issues relating to young people that it was felt important to allow young people to share their own stories for an older audience.

At the start of the project, what students in both schools felt would be most challenging for them was the story creation and writing, while some felt the drawing would be a challenge. 40% of all students who returned pre-project questionnaires in both schools felt the writing and story creation would be the most challenging aspect of the project, while 20% felt the drawing would be challenging and 15% felt the organisation of the project, particularly putting the story to the visuals would be challenging. Some comments from students are below:

- Writing a story, brainstorming ideas
- Spelling and getting a good story
- Drawing –I’m not that good at art
- “Putting everything together, because I seem to give up after a while”
- The drawing of the comic as I am not the best a illustration
- “Writing, not good at English”
- “The only part I’m not looking forward is the whole organisation part of the project and picking out the storyline”

### **Literacies and Skills Gained**

#### **What students feel they learned:**

- “Working in a group, working with others “
- “I learned how to use a Mac computer”
- “To use perspective in comics. Draw a more character style of person than a real person...”
- “I learned lots about graphic novels layout, style, etc”
- “I learned a comic art style of drawing using different techniques”
- “How to make the basic steps to write a short story”
- That it is not hard to make a story”

#### Accessing Comics / Graphic Novels

At the start of the project, ½ the students who returned pre-project questionnaires from Coláiste Bríde explained that they had not previously read a comic book or graphic novel while in Firhouse Community College 72 % who returned a pre-project questionnaire had. While some young people became more interested in comics and graphic novels and felt they had learned more about them since their involvement in the project, only a very few students have accessed graphic novels or comics outside involvement with the project. However, 67% of Firhouse students who gave post-project feedback (10 out of 15) stated their interest in graphic novels and comics has

“peaked” since the project and they feel it likely they would access this literature in the future.

#### Students felt they learned applicable creative writing techniques during the project

Feedback provided by students from both schools demonstrated that they had gained a greater understanding of ways to approach story development via basic building-block style steps. They felt that the techniques learned from the creative writing facilitator were useful and accessible. In particular, they felt the application of drama for creating dialogue and actualising how a situation might play out within a story was not only extraordinarily helpful but also fun. An artist explained,

*“The story has a lot of dialogue in it, and I felt that they really improved on this a lot during their workshopping with [the drama practitioner]. I had thought that we would have to sit down at some point to write a script. As it turned out, the acting workshop (where some students wrote down dialogue and story as it was created) gave us a complete script and finished dialogue for our comic. [The drama facilitator] worked hard on coaxing very definite and fitting words from the group and they responded very well to his working methods. I think that they produced the script in this practical, hands-on way without feeling under pressure or afraid to make a mistake.”*

#### Students gained visual literacy skills

Many students exhibited a growth in understanding regarding the effects of comic-style story telling, which mixes text and visuals. They clearly gained an understanding of how to bring text and image together in comic art to express creative and original ideas. Students discussed a growing awareness of the importance of perspective, particularly in relation to indicating the progression of the order in which dialogue should be read. Further, students commented on the visual depiction of character, specifically how the feelings and expressions of characters may be expressed visually in order to communicate particular ideas about characters to their readers.

#### Students gained skills in IT

Students commented on gaining confidence and experience in working with computers during the project. Working with Adobe Photoshop—drawing and colouring characters and backgrounds for the comic—was a new experience for a majority of students in both schools. Not only were they newly introduced to Photoshop, but in some cases MAC computers as well.

Students found posting to the NOISE Projects page at times laborious and confusing. The facility utilising icons to indicate how to post images, which are not always intuitively understood by students who comfortable using websites such as Facebook. Further, students were required to resize images to lower resolution in order to quicken uploading and downloading. This was found to be cumbersome and frustrating for students.

### Social and Personal Literacies

A number of students commented on the team-work aspects of the project, highlighting “working well with others” as a key aspect of learning developed during the project. In addition, a number of students commented on meeting and working with new people, such as the artists as a highlight of the project.

*“[Drama, role playing and acting] seemed to me a creative and highly effective way of making the groups consider the language, wording and meaning of dialogue used in their stories.”*

Artist

Working in teams was a critical aspect of project work. The Comic Artist explained that the way in which the students worked together and met their own deadlines was a positive experience of the project—one that did not necessarily need to be minded by artist or teacher. The creation of the overall visual appearance of the story was a real challenge as students had to determine how they would bring together the different images created by different individual students into one cohesive visual representation of their story. Teamwork was a critical aspect to this decision-making:

*“They also learned how to work in teams, even more so than in groups. I had considered appointing a group leader for each scene, but the teams immediately organised themselves and it was unnecessary. Once given the responsibility of producing a set amount of the content, they worked with very little supervision and within each team kept an eye on their deadlines and workload.*

*At this stage, and then later when we were digitally colouring, the students kept up a dialogue with each other, comparing character designs and colours so that the different scenes maintained consistency throughout the comic. This was something that I had mentioned, but felt that I would probably need to supervise myself. I never needed to; the students took up that responsibility and worked between the teams to ensure that the colouring and designs of 20 different artists had enough points of similarity for the comic to work. I was very impressed by the team working of both groups: they really took on far more than I had expected.”*

Another artist explained:

*“I also thought that most of the individuals involved demonstrated a great ability to work co-operatively and grasp the notion of “group ownership” of their project.”*

## **Awareness of Facilities and Resources Available**

### RUA RED, South Dublin Arts Centre

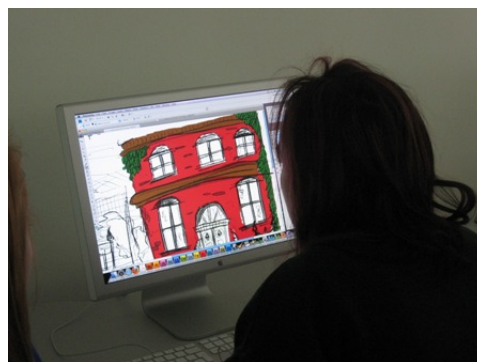
At the start of the project, the majority of students who returned pre-project questionnaires from Coláiste Bríde had not previously visited RUA RED, South Dublin Arts Centre nor Tallaght Library, however the majority had been to their local library in Clondalkin. Visits to Tallaght Library were more common in Firhouse Community School, which is more local to the area, with 93% having visited previous to the commencement of the project.

All participants who took part in the focus group in Coláiste Bríde were delighted to learn more about RUA RED. Since involvement in the project, young people

from Coláiste Bríde began to attend other workshops and activities in the centre, particularly NOISE Flicks Youth Film Festival, an initiative of South Dublin County Council that is supported by RUA RED. Feedback from these young people based in Clondalkin demonstrates a real correlation between involvement in *Drawn Together* and audience development for RUA RED.

### Library Services, Tallaght Library

While many students had been to Tallaght Library before, particularly those who attend Firhouse Community College, they did feel they learned more about the facility as a result of involvement in the project. Students described; the seminar and computer rooms; the DVD collection; the improvement and expansion of the book collection and the modern design and the way in which the library is laid out, including its spaciousness and small enclosed study areas as highlights. The majority of students who gave feedback from Firhouse feel that they will continue to visit the library after the project is completed, particularly to study. Students from Coláiste Bríde were also impressed by the facilities of Tallaght Library. Due to the distance from home and school, however, only a few said they would return to that library, as there is a library facility in Clondalkin supported by South Dublin County Library Services.



*Students utilising RUA RED's  
MAC Lab*

**Comments students made regarding Tallaght Library:**

- “I think it’s great for activities/workshops and studying”
- “Yes. [I will continue to visit] I didn’t know there were rooms in Tallaght library until we went into one so it will be interesting to see what else is there”
- “I think it’s a nice modern, library with a good selection”
- “I really like it. It’s really well laid out, has everything you would need”
- “It looked a lot better since the last time I visited. It had been done up and looked a lot bigger”
- “I think it’s vastly improved; the building and the book selection”

**Download Zone and Graphic Novel Collection**

While students were impressed to learn of the collections and resources available via South Dublin Library Services, these were largely under utilised during the project. Only one student utilised the Library’s Download Zone during the project, and s/he felt the facility confusing.

While students were introduced to a history of comics by way of a presentation at the start of the project, there appears to have been little review or connection made between what it was that the students were creating and the wider world of comics and graphic novels. Library collections were not utilised and left in classroom facilities for reference, nor were they referred to very often. This lack of connection lessened the potential of the project to contribute to the artistic and creative development of students in relation to a broader context of the field of comic / graphic art.

**Awareness of Wider Artistic Context and Development**

This evaluation attempted to garner whether or not the project contributed to an increase in students’ knowledge of the arts, specifically careers and artistic practice, in ways in which they may consider developing themselves.

One teacher commented on the fact that she felt students “benefited from the project and were exposed to artwork they had no previous experience of”. In fact a number of students commented on not having previous knowledge of how comics were made. Further meeting and working with “real artists” was a highlight of the project for many students.

**Links between Artforms**

The connection between art forms was a critical aspect of the project. In particular, the use of drama served as a bridge between the story creation and the creation of visuals. The Comic Artist explained,

*“The work done by [the writer] and [the drama practitioner] laid the groundwork for [the visual work undertaken] with the students. Creating a story, exploring themes and refining original ideas was all part of the earlier*

*work. It meant that when I came to work with the group, they were ready to make something from their ideas. So after [the earlier sessions] that concentrated on concepts, I straight away had the students work practically, creating something physical using drawing and collage. It made them think more about their characters in depth, so there was still concept development, but focussing more on the visual.*

*Bringing [the drama practitioner] back in for an extra session in my third week with the group was invaluable. They had images for their story, but no definite structure, so the extra acting workshop really tightened up the whole project. By the end of that one class, we had a full script and rough scene sketches created. The final comic was based closely on these.*

*Also, these extra [drama] sessions... were really popular with the students and made them very excited about their comics. I found that it gave them something definite to work on; they were more informed about how the stories were going to be told."*

### Celebration of work

A key highlight of the project for all involved, especially students, was the fact that the completed stories were published in a book. Holding a celebration event, hosted by the Mayor of the County and being presented with their books helped close the project in a way that celebrated all that was achieved by students. Attendance of the Arts Council and parents was also appreciated. All students mentioned this aspect as a highlight of the project and something they were looking most forward to. The attendance of the local newspaper at the event was also a positive and helped the students feel their achievements were acknowledged widely.

## **Teacher Experience**

### **Professional Development**

Teachers involved in the project expressed learning gained from their own perspectives. One, who has previous experience in graphic design felt that she had seen new ways in which to work with the students on computers and using facilities available in the local area. Another teacher commented on the way in which the project linked art forms as a learning area.

### **Project logistics**

#### Timetable

As may often be the case, the school timetable and artistic projects often clash. As students commented that the project may have continued on longer than needed, one teacher commented on how having a series of consecutive days blocked-out from the timetable and thus dedicated to the project may have helped with maintaining consistency for students in developing work. For one school, getting the story agreed upon and then completing the visuals was challenging at times due to the timetable of other activities planned during Transition Year. While timetables were agreed at the start of the project, a degree of flexibility is required and was met

by all involved. The teacher explained that consecutive dedicated project days may have kept a level of momentum going to finish work more quickly. This matter was not, however, a concern in both schools.

### Relaxed Atmosphere

Feedback in, and observation during, the evaluation process demonstrated that the project contributed to a relaxed atmosphere amongst students during the project. The workshops were constructed in an open way, where students could contribute ideas and chat amongst themselves as they developed the visual representations of characters as well as their story ideas. In addition, the drama aspects of the project were seen and understood to be engaging and fun.

### **Awareness of Facilities and Resources Available**

#### Download Zone and Graphic Novel Collection

More advantage of the Library Services' Download Zone facility could have been taken during the project. Evaluation findings show that a lack of use of the facility was, in part, due to feelings of time constraints during the project, but also because the facility was found to be confusing and navigation of it unclear.



*Comic Drawings done during the project*

## Artist Experience

### Facilities

The Comic artist supported students to post progress updates and images to the NOISE South Dublin Projects page. Like the students, the artist found the system counter-intuitive and cumbersome.

### Support

For artists working in schools, teacher support is critical. During this project, teachers were felt by all involved to be incredibly supportive, engaged and enthusiastic throughout the project.

*“The interest and enthusiasm of both teachers made this project the success it has been....Both teachers were in constant communication with me about anything they thought might affect the sessions and always discussed any progress in the work. It felt very much like a team effort in each school, and that is due in the main part to the teachers and the support of the schools involved.”*

Artist

## Partnership

### Model

Not all partners involved in the project returned questionnaires submitted for evaluation. However, through discussion as well as questionnaires, it appears that the experience of partnership working between RUA RED, the Library Services and South Dublin County Council’s Arts Office was a positive one. Planning meetings were highlighted as a strong aspect of establishing clear aims and objectives for all involved, including partner organisations and schools as well as ensuring clear lines of communication and methods of supports for artists, students and teachers in working on the project. Individuals from the partnership organisations are interested in supporting a similar project again or in working together again.

### Audience Development and Value

It appears that outreach projects by centres and libraries that go out to schools, but bring students back to their centres do make an impact on audience development for organisations involved.

### Building Audiences for RUA RED

As described earlier in the evaluation a number of students from Coláiste Bríde, based in Clondalkin are now accessing RUA RED more regularly, having not previously been to or heard of the Centre. This is noteworthy as to get to the Centre, students must walk quite a distance to the LUAS stop in their area and then travel to the Centre by tram.

Further all students commented on what type of workshops they would like to attend at RUA RED in the future. These included: dance, drama, filmmaking, creative writing, animation, graphic design, photography, and general art-making workshops. Both animation and screenwriting workshops held in conjunction with NOISE Flicks Youth Film Festival (March 2011) were attended by students from Coláiste Bríde.



### Building Audiences for Tallaght Library

As mentioned previously in this report, students who had not been visiting Tallaght Library were extremely impressed by the new facilities since the building's refurbishment and plan to visit again for studying. The project definitely contributed to building awareness of the facility for students involved in the project and in what the collections have to offer. Students who may have previously visited to study gained a greater understanding of the services provided and collections on offer to them.

### Celebration Events

Celebration of work builds the profile of organisations involved, allowing new audiences to see the arts and library facilities and resources available in the County. Such events also allow the wider school to see the value of such arts projects, even if they are not directly involved in the delivery.

*"Thank you once more for the opportunity offered to our students. Again it has been such a positive and enjoyable experience for all involved. They have learned so much."*

TY Coordinator, not directly involved in the project

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through involvement in *Drawn Together*, students gained personal, social, IT and literacy skills. In addition, teachers and students gained a greater awareness of the facilities available within the County for arts and creativity as well as learning. The organisations involved in facilitating the project may see such programmes as opportunities to build audiences, not only amongst young people, but teachers as well. Finally, both teachers and artists seemed to have gained new experiences and insights into project delivery for learning outcomes for students. Multi-disciplinary and multi-venue projects contribute real value to learning for all involved.



*At the launch event, May 2011*

Arts projects have a real contribution to make toward various aspects of literacy for students. Partnership working toward achieving such goals allows for a variety of expertise to come together for positive outcomes.

Future partnership on multi-disciplinary arts and literacy based projects is recommended. Below is a list of areas of improvement and / or recommendations for future projects based on learning gained from *Drawn Together*:

- A strong aspect of the project has been the fact that it took place both within and without the school. Educational outreach projects with centres and libraries that go out to schools, but bring students back to their centres do make an impact on audience development figures for those institutions, but also provide students with a wider awareness of the potential for taking part in the arts both immediately and in a more long-term way. Partner organisations and South Dublin County Council's Arts Office should consider developing future school-based arts programmes that encourage the use of and visits to facilities in the area.
- The Download Zone facility has much potential for bringing library collections into the classroom. Library Services may consider a series of consultation

groups with library users in order to see how the Download Zone may be improved and thus better utilised.

- Consider timetabling consecutive, dedicated art project days to maintain momentum and finish work on time. This would not necessarily be possible for all schools and should be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- The facility for posting to the NOISE South Dublin Projects page needs to be redesigned. This matches findings from an evaluation study of the overall website conducted by Emma Creighton for South Dublin County Council's Arts Office from October 2010 – March 2011. The Arts Office is currently planning to redesign this website.
- The use of drama in writing stories should be explored further in future projects.
- Holding celebration events and showcasing / publishing finished work is critical to students and their wider school realising what they have achieved during a project.

*"This project demanded a fair level of commitment from schools and teachers which has been acknowledged throughout its duration. But what must not be over looked is the vision and commitment of the Library, RUA, and... the Arts Office..."*

Artist

## **WORK CITED**

Gibson, M. (2010) "We don't need just the DFC, we need lots of comics. And what's more, we can make them. Let's get to it!": David Fickling, The DFC and the DFC Library," *Inis* 33: pp. 19 – 33.