

High Flying 'FEATHERS'

A Study Support Initiative that Uses Design and Technology as the Focus for Families to Learn Together

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Abstract

Watching children engaged in talking about, making, modifying and giving a quality finish to their design and technology work is something that still gives me a 'buzz'! It is this same excitement and motivation that makes 'designing and making' an ideal stimulus for a family learning project.

What is 'FEATHERS'?

This is the name given to the Boots Family Learning Project, a Nottingham-based initiative which is funded by The Boots Company. This project is built around a series of after school workshops, which involve design and technology activities. These provide a focus for families to find out together about how to construct things, the way they work and how to apply a variety of finishing techniques. The project is known locally as FEATHERS, the acronym standing for: Family Evening Activities That Help Everyone Relax Socially.

All the members of this after school club go away at the end of a workshop with more than just 'a feather in their cap' – they go away with a good feeling about themselves, the school and the value of spending time on making things together.

The Boots Family Learning Project uses this strategy to help to achieve its aims of enriching the family unit as a base for learning and enhancing the links between home, school and the wider community. This project therefore draws upon two key areas of the Government's School Effectiveness Strategy – family learning and study support – with design and technology being used as a highly motivating stimulus for the workshops.

Who runs the project?

The Boots Company have overall responsibility.

The project schools meet three times per year to review the progress of the project and to solve any logistical problems that arise. Education Extra help to evaluate and disseminate the project at a national level. Pat Webster, the project leader, is responsible for the format, content and delivery of the workshops, with support from the heads, project teachers and students from Nottingham Trent University and Basford Hall College.

The project staff ensure that the families find the resources they need; help to demonstrate the correct use of tools and equipment; extend the ideas gained during the workshop and give the children encouragement through a certificate award scheme. This year a membership PASSPORT is being introduced which will give a full calendar of events for the year, vouchers for the holiday activities and act as a further record of achievement.

What do the families feel about FEATHERS?

"It's even good for the community. They know something's happening here. You walk out carrying what you've made and people stop and ask you questions about it. I gave my puppet to a lady in a wheelchair and it made her day."

"Parents can actually see what their children's capabilities are. When you're at work you simply come home and read them a story and leave it at that – you don't do things of this calibre with them."

"You're probably got everything here at home, but you wouldn't dream of putting them together the way Pat does – I don't throw anything away now."

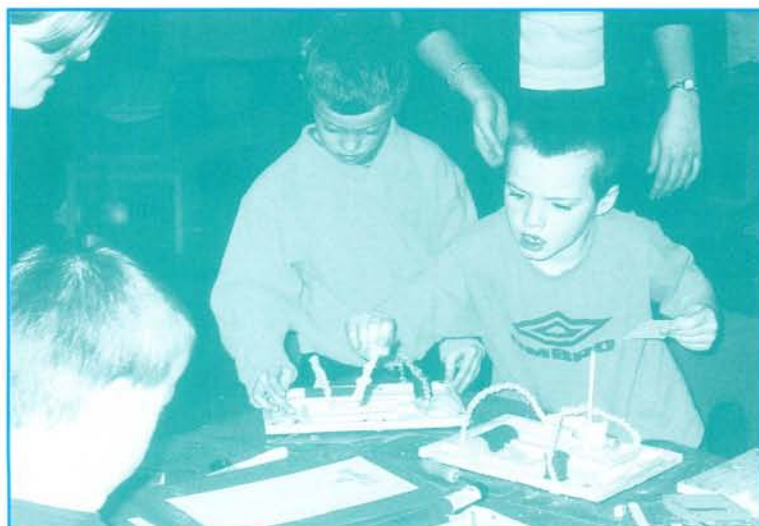
"I made a Christmas tree with flashing lights – I'd never in my life done anything like that before."

"If I go home I'll just be cooking and everybody else will be watching the telly, too busy to talk to each other. I enjoy it."

"I think it's a good idea, you've got more time to talk to the teacher or head – we didn't have anything like this when we were at school."

What do the schools think about FEATHERS?

The FEATHERS initiative is beginning to develop improved standards in design and technology – alongside the more general aims of study support, e.g.



- enhanced self-esteem
- better attitudes to school and to education and to learning in general
- opportunities to develop relationships with different peers and new adults
- achievement of better results than similar groups of pupils who do not take part.

Nevertheless for a school to make a commitment to such an initiative, it needs to see the school as well as the families benefiting, especially when the focus is design and technology with all the practical and organisational issues this involves. This selection of comments collected from the head teachers and staff involved highlight some of the positive outcomes so far of the FEATHERS club.

"Multiple benefits of parents working with their children in a structured manner, watching professionals at work with children. A positive school experience for many who were not successful themselves at school."

"Parents have got something to contribute, it's not us giving all the time. They have a very valid contribution to make. It enhances partnership."

"Many families with special needs were there showing families that schools are worthwhile places to be."

"Spending valuable time with parents and helpers in a lively and relaxed atmosphere, sharing an extensive range of materials and being able to take home a finished product at the end of the session. All this was created within the framework of a learning situation about pulleys and gears."

"Children/adults learning together – (positive messages about life long education) – a great many families asked when the next ones would be – it was fun and focused!"

"Simple steps – simple tasks – great results – increased self esteem and image."

"After school with parents/grandparents/older brothers/sisters all actively involved and end of session product to take home. Improved levels of achievement. Enticing parents into school who rarely come. Meeting teachers on a different level."

"They are able to use the National Curriculum creatively and extend it around their own interests, for example all the work they did with circuits could never have been done in a classroom."

"The parents who attended were delighted to find themselves in a learning situation with their children and having fun! Getting to know parents in a more informal atmosphere is also very important for us."

"Pat's enthusiasm was matched by the head's keenness to be personally involved."

"It gives parents the chance to see that they can make a difference."

"Bliss of working with quality/plentiful materials. Joy of working without Ofsted/National Curriculum pressures – chance to experience buzz of real education."

"Working with children with a wealth of materials and readily available helpers to support activities. I felt parents took time to roll up sleeves and become partners with their children after first expecting teachers or helpers to be the partner role."

How do you fund a study support initiative?

The benefits to all the partners involved are clear from these comments but to establish such a study support programme takes time, commitment and money. Such initiatives can be funded by industry, as in the case of the FEATHERS project, but there are other sources of support available.

The foreword, by Charles Clarke, in the recently published DfEE guidelines *Study Support – A Code of Practice for the Primary Sector* indicates the Government's commitment to these initiatives and possible available funding avenues.

"The Government believes that all young people can benefit from the additional opportunities to learn and succeed which study support offers ... As part of the



Government's continuing work to extend the opportunities available to children and young people, £140 million of Lottery funding is available for study support in England through the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). NOF's targets include supporting activities in at least a quarter of all primary schools by 2001."

How can I find out more about this initiative?

The aim of this article is to document the way in which the Boots Family Learning Project (FEATHERS) was established, is run, the curriculum development opportunities within it and the areas that are being developed.

It is based on the end of Year 1 report (the development stage of the process) and the work carried out so far in Year 2 – the demonstration phase of the project. Next year will see the hand-over phase with schools/parent facilitators taking on the delivery and management of the workshops.

Background to the project

The Boots Company has a long history of community involvement, working in partnership with local and national organisations on projects relating to education, health, environment and safer communities. For the third year running, Boots was named by an annual MORI survey as one of the top three companies perceived by the general public to take its corporate social responsibility seriously.

Many of The Boots Company's projects that contribute to its Corporate Community Investment (CCI) strategy are located in Nottingham, the base of its group headquarters and five of its businesses.

The location of the project, the Clifton estate, was selected in consultation with the Local

Education Authority. The estate, which is situated on the southwestern periphery of the city, is geographically close to The Boots Company's main site.

The Boots Company's commitment is as follows:

- a financial commitment of £98,580 over a three-year period
- management of the project by the company's Group Education Liaison Co-ordinator. This includes strategy development and overall responsibility for the smooth running of the initiative.
- ongoing contribution of quality resources for all workshops, many through the Boots Recycling Project
- additional funding for one-off initiatives, for example the Families Finding Out Together holiday activities
- funding for an end of project evaluation report.

Partnership with Education Extra

The expertise of Education Extra was sought to assist with the following aspects of the project:

- advice and guidance regarding family learning, particularly within the context of study support
- promotion of the project
- dissemination of good practice
- operational responsibility for administrative support, receiving and processing payment claims
- support for the evaluation process.

The appointment of a Project Leader

Once the working relationship with Education Extra was established, a Project Leader was appointed (July 1998). The successful candidate, Pat Webster, a former design and technology adviser, brought to the project a vast wealth of practical, administrative and managerial experience. Her specialism provided the project with a clear focus for the workshops. It had the added appeal that the programme of activities would be of a practical 'make and do' nature and might therefore appeal to a wider cross section of families than workshops focusing on, for instance, literacy or numeracy.

The Project Leader's remit was identified as follows:

- to be responsible for the content, format and development of the workshops



- to be the main point of contact with the schools, with responsibility for the delivery of the project
- to work with the schools to develop a successful and sustainable series of family learning workshops held at the end of the school day (3.30–5.00pm). Three, 90-minute workshops to be organised per term at each school, over a three-year period.
- to recruit and train a team of voluntary helpers for the workshops
- to identify and manage the resources required by the Family Learning programme.

Participating schools

Four schools Brinkhill, Brooksby, Milford and Whitegate Primary agreed to take the Project forward. The roles and responsibilities of the schools were negotiated at the launch meeting. These were as follows:

- to work closely with the Project Leader, The Boots Company and Education Extra to implement The Boots Family Learning Project
- in consultation with the Project Leader, to develop a whole school approach to family learning
- to actively promote participation in the workshops
- to ensure that at least one member of staff is present at each workshop
- to support a six-monthly review and forward planning meeting
- to provide information to support the evaluation of the project.

Project aims

The following project aims were agreed by all concerned:

- to raise standards of achievement, self esteem and confidence through family learning
- to support parents as children's first and natural teachers and to encourage parental involvement in their children's learning at school and at home
- to support the school curriculum through an after school programme of design and technology workshops
- to foster the participation of business and other partners in the education of young people and their families
- to develop a sustainable model of good family learning practice



'FEATHERS'
~the after school club
for families ~
is back at
WHITEGATE School
– on Thursday
11th NOVEMBER

Have you ever wondered what a
'Millennium bug' looks like?

Come along on the 11th November
and find out how to make a 'Millennium bug'
run, spin, hover, move quickly
or slowly - it's up to you !!

- to create fun, collaborative learning opportunities in a relaxed atmosphere.

Implementing the project

Following the initial launch meeting the following steps were taken to ensure that the project was both a practical and successful experience for all those involved.

To establish the Project Leader's credibility with the schools an offer was made by Pat to:

- attend staff meetings to share the aims of the project
 - work in the classrooms to demonstrate her credentials to staff and pupils, whilst also stimulating interest in the workshops.
- Every workshop commences with a brief 'fun' presentation on the evening's activities. Certain learning and safety points are also covered, using stimulus models and other visual aids that help the workshop 'come to life'. This introductory session is preceded by refreshments, to promote social interaction amongst the

The Boots Family Learning Project. September 1998 – July 1999 Workshop themes and learning objectives.

TERM	Workshop Title	Knowledge & Understanding	Designing & Making Skills
AUTUMN	WHEELS	Using wheels and axles to create movement – off centre wheels. K'NEX construction kit used to demonstrate stored energy.	Correct use of supa snips and hole punch. Different ways of cladding models.
	FESTIVE FEATHERS	Introduction to simple circuits and paper clip switches. Use of gear wheels to create a change of speed. Stored energy 'festive' roundabout.	Using wire strippers, battery tester and tapered reamer safely. Paper cutting/folding
SPRING	FUN WITH FABRICS	How the working characteristics of materials relate to the way they are used. Combining to create new properties. Using heat to fix colours.	Designing on paper before using fabric crayons/pens. Silk painting. Weaving.
	MAKING MONSTERS MOVE !	Relating the way things work to their intended purpose. Use of motors and reversing switch. Stored energy model Simple pneumatics and levers.	Mounting motors securely. Techniques for using corriflute and attaching balloons.
	MASKS AND PUPPETS	Changing the properties of materials through the use of heat. Creating stable structures. Combining materials to improve characteristics	Safe use of bench hook and junior hacksaw Modelling materials. Complete work at home
'FAMILIES FINDING OUT TOGETHER' – special Easter event at the Kelham Island Industrial Museum in Sheffield – practical science and technology based activities – including a computer animation and construction kits.			
SUMMER	TELL ME A STORY	Electrical circuits and pressure pad switch. Building wooden structures. Control technology – programming the 'Roamer' to complete set tasks.	Ways of joining wood. Making a pressure pad. Wiring buzzers. Sequencing activities.
	TOYS AND GAMES	Extending knowledge of electrics to include parallel circuits. Consolidate understanding of different types of wood and their respective properties.	Safe use of drill with balsa /junior hacksaws with 1cm section wood. Design of maze games.
	ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR !	Using knowledge of gears to reduce the speed of the motors. Lights and buzzers also available. Introduction of crank axle / triangular structures	Wooden spatulas and card circle technique. Variety of original roundabout designs.
SPRING BANK HOLIDAY EVENT – at Caudwell's Mill, Rowsley, Derbyshire. Special activities and guided tours based in and around the mill, including operating the pulleys and gears, grinding and baking bread.			

families, whilst providing an opportunity for pupils to 'switch off' from school and 'tune in' to the workshops.

- Pat, together with the schools, decided to develop a corporate image for the workshops. A logo was devised and used on posters and other materials distributed to the schools and parents. The logo was also put on the workshop folders and used for the 'Shrinkles', a plastic sheet that shrinks when heated, badges that the families made.
- The workshops have a friendly image i.e. the FEATHERS club – individual workshops are given a catchy title, incorporating whenever possible, the corporate acronym e.g. FESTIVE FEATHERS (a workshop near to Christmas when families produced a Christmas tree with working lights) and FEATHERS IN A SPIN (tasks relating to gears and pulleys). In spite of the 'user friendly' titles the workshops are all underpinned by clear learning objectives, which ensure continuity and development of skills and knowledge
- The sessions use the knowledge and experience gained in one workshop to support the challenges to be set in the next. For example, the theme of 'using simple circuits' has been used five times, but on each occasion using a different context and stimulus model to build upon the skills and knowledge gained from the previous session e.g.
 - naming the different components
 - using wire strippers safely and accurately
 - techniques for joining the different parts of a circuit
 - ways of mounting motors and other components securely
 - making a variety of switches
 - using different battery holders
 - the significance of the positive and negative terminals on the battery
 - fault finding and repairing circuits
 - testing and modifying models.

Contexts

Christmas tree lights – using a simple circuit.

'Buzz bags' – buzzers and pressure pads.

'Robots' – introducing the use of parallel circuits.

Motorised 'buggies' – using pulleys to reduce the speed of the motor and a reversing switch; some children also added head lamps or a buzzer to their model.

Fairground games and rides – which had motors mounted horizontally and vertically. The roundabouts also used gears to adjust their speed.

- All the activities are differentiated to cover and test the capabilities of an age range which stretches from pre-school to secondary aged pupils, to adults of all ages and abilities.
- Participants are given the time and space to develop their skills at their own pace and in their own way. The differentiation of challenges was noted by a parent who commented that: "It doesn't matter what age they are, or what stage of development they are at, they can use the resources to whatever ability they've got."
- Very high quality resource materials are always provided and these add to the appeal of the workshops. They are used alongside familiar products such as LEGO and K'NEX.
- Workshop booklets are produced to suggest simple activities that families can try at home. 'Wheels' and 'Materials' have been the themes of the two booklets produced to date.
- Workshop achievements are also acknowledged in school, either in assembly or in class. For example, one head teacher has an honours assembly every Friday when they take the opportunity to let the pupils show their work and talk about what they've done.
- Representatives from all the interested parties attend regular review and evaluation meetings. The schools complete a termly evaluation form.

In order to mark the commencement of the second year of the project, a special meeting was held. The outcomes of the first year's work were shared with a specially invited audience, comprising of representatives from the participating schools, including governors, the two feeder secondary schools, the two local universities, the adult education service and the LEA.

Attendance figures at the workshops have exceeded any previous initiative involving parents. It is never an easy challenge for schools serving less advantaged areas to bring parents and carers to out of school activities. However, the project schools have been successful in encouraging family members to

Certificate in Supporting Children's Technology Skills

Children love to make things
- you can help them by learning new skills
and gaining a qualification at the same time.

To find out more

Come along and talk to Pat
at BRINKHILL SCHOOL
~ 1:30 on Friday 31st March ~



Who is this certificate for?

Interested in developing your creative and practical skills?
Do your children come to the 'FEATHERS' club?
Are you involved in the local community?
Do you enjoy working with children?

If the answer is 'YES' to any of these questions
- this certificate is designed for you



What will this certificate cover?

- How to use a range of tools safely
- Shaping and joining different materials
- Ways of making moving joints and putting wheels on to models
- Techniques for adding surface decorations to create exciting effects
- Sharing activities with children and members of the 'FEATHERS' club
- Knowledge about simple circuits - including motors, buzzers and lights

Where does it take place?

In the community room at BRINKHILL SCHOOL - crèche available
1:00 to 3:00 every Friday from 5th May to 21st July 2000

work alongside their children. A head teacher commented: "We've had many ways of involving parents in the life of the school - but this has been the most successful by far. It's brilliant."

Number on roll	Average number of families at each workshop	Average total attendance at each workshop
257	31	90
200	15	55
415	52	95
466	22	65

Holiday Families Finding Out Together initiatives have also been arranged. Over the Easter holiday, four coaches took over 212 people (53 families) to Kelham Island Industrial Museum, Sheffield. This involved families in a range of activities that helped them understand the steel making process. A parent commented: "The trips in the holiday for the whole family are marvellous. It's reasonably priced and you go to places that

you wouldn't think of going to." A further initiative was a 'one off' daytime 'Story Sacks' workshop, the Director of 'Story Sacks' led this special day. Schools were invited to send two members of staff and interested parents. The subsequent FEATHERS workshop used the theme of 'Tell me a story' to build upon this initiative. One school has undoubtedly benefited from this initiative - a head teacher commented: "We asked twelve of the mums to come in twice a week and make 'Story Sacks'. One of the parents has also raised £900 in sponsorship."

The importance of the student helpers to the project

Student helpers were recruited from Nottingham Trent University. A presentation to second year students outlined the proposed role of the project and the expectations of facilitators. At the end of each workshop the student facilitators talk about the evening's activities with the children and give 'Special Award' certificates to the participating families. Students are remunerated (£5 per hour), and at the end of the academic year presented with a certificate to support their CV. The involvement of students has proved to be invaluable for all concerned, not least to the students themselves.

What do the student helpers gain from the project?

- Experience of working with children from a wide age range, 3-11 year olds.
- Professional development from working alongside teachers, parents/carers, grandparents, governors, head teachers and the project leader.
- The chance to develop and consolidate practical skills and accumulate ideas for their work with children.
- An opportunity to establish relationships with local schools, enhancing their personal profile/CV and future employment prospects.
- Responsibilities that build confidence including organisational skills.

Comments from students taking part in the first year of the project

"It's given me a lot of ideas that I can use in a classroom. It's extended my own practical experience because I'm not a practical person."

"It's useful to demonstrate to parents how to question their children when they are choosing tools and materials."

"I'm getting experience of using a wide range of resources, it's also fun to work with kids outside a classroom setting

where it's more constraining."

"I'm getting to know the schools on the estate."

"I think it's brilliant. They are getting hands on experience of technology."

"I didn't know how to do things like this until I came here and it's only by doing that you learn."

"It's great; I'm really enjoying it. I think we should all get these opportunities."

"It's interesting working with parents. You don't get that opportunity on teaching practice. It's also interesting to work with all age groups. You don't get that opportunity on teaching practice either."

"I think it's a brilliant idea, especially the fact that parents are here. They are getting the chance to be part of their children's education."

"It's good experience working with kids. You can't get too much experience. It keeps me in touch with kids between teaching practices. You are away from children for eight months!"

"It's a brilliant learning experience for us, the parents and the children."

"It's good experience and I'm not too hot on design and technology and Pat's ideas have helped us with our course work."

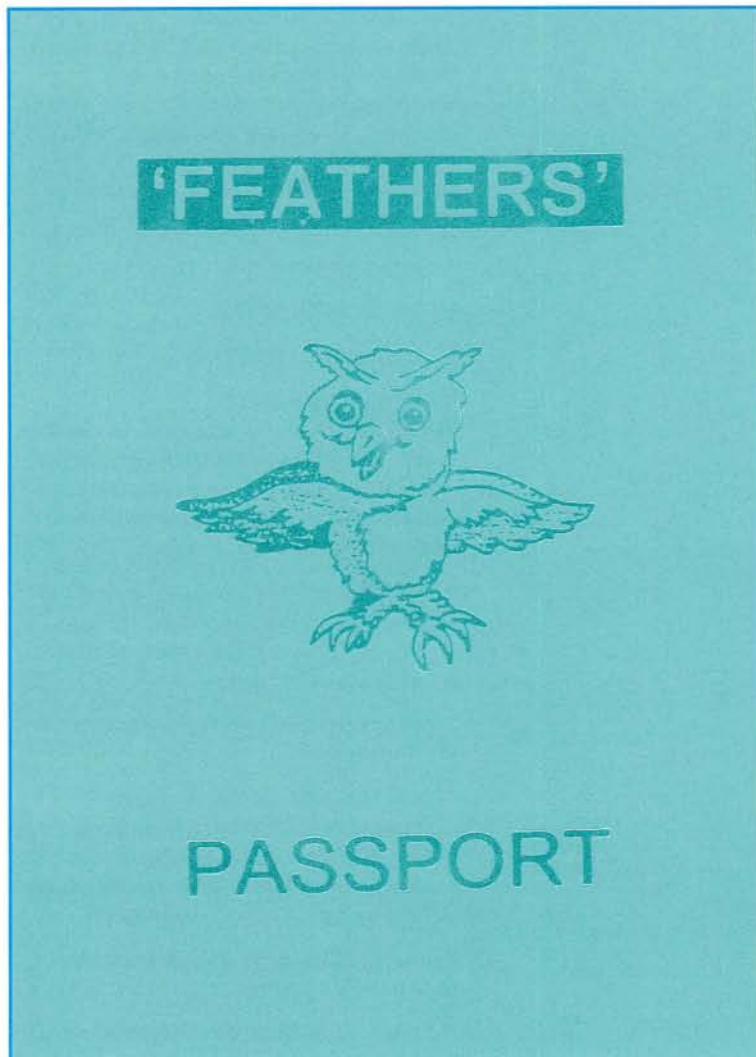
"You have to think on your feet and work around the problems with the children."

What does the project gain from the student helpers?

- an improvement in the ratio of helpers to participants – enabling children to receive an appropriate level of support and activities which need additional supervision to be undertaken
- help with establishing the effective management of resources – to prevent wastage; to ensure they are cleared away carefully; and to check stock ready for the next workshop
- clear demonstration of the safe and appropriate use of tools and equipment, this may include supervising a specific item such as a hand drill or responding to requests for help from groups or individuals
- discussion time with children – to show parents how questions can be used to extend their knowledge, for example, by encouraging them to think about how things work; how things are joined together; how they can be made stronger;

fault finding and ways to produce a good quality finish

- supervision of potentially dangerous or more complex activities – such as control technology involving the 'Roamer'; or placing work in the oven when materials such as 'Shrinkles' and 'Formafoam' are being used
- providing a positive role model, encouraging a sense of achievement for all members of the FEATHERS club, including listening to their accounts of the evening, encouraging evaluation of models and talking about activities they have tried at home.
- awarding special 'recognition' certificates to the children at the end of their making activities and by stamping their membership PASSPORT at the beginning of the evening.



Outcomes of the project

There are already many positive outcomes to the Project, which have benefited all concerned, hence the title for the end of Year 1 report – 'Everybody's Winning'. Whilst appreciating that many of the outcomes are mutually beneficial, for ease of reference, they have been classified as follows:

- outcomes for pupils
- outcomes for families
- outcomes for schools.

Outcomes for pupils

The workshops are an alternative to boredom outside school hours and the temptation for pupils to get into the wrong company. It is also pleasing to note that many pupils will continue with the work at home:

"When I go home I'm going to make puppets to fit into my theatre. I'll also paint it. I'll also make another of what we've done."

Pupils get enormous fun and enjoyment from the workshops.

"It's been a brilliant night, hasn't it? [parent] It's brilliant, it's class. Look at him he's enthralled by it all [older brother – 16 years of age] I get a lot of enjoyment from coming here. I just love it [pupil]."

Pupils look forward to attending and don't want to miss a session.

"This is a brilliant idea. The middle one, if I didn't come, he'd never forgive me; my life wouldn't be worth living. She loves it. She wasn't very well one day, but because she didn't want to miss this, she made herself come to school."

These comments suggest that the workshops can encourage a positive attitude to school attendance.

Pupils are given 'quality time' by their parents/carers. It is apparent that opportunities for undisturbed individual attention between family members can sometimes be limited. Many parents recognise this deficit in their personal lives and they value and welcome the opportunities provided by the schools to address this matter.

"This is the only quality time that I can give to my daughter. I've got two fifteen year olds at home, who take all of my time when I'm there. This is my daughter's time".

For one father, who is separated from his wife and daughter, the workshops provide an ideal meeting point, as he explains:

"It's neutral territory for meeting my daughter. It's somewhere you can do something together and it doesn't cost anything."

Pupils developed a sense of achievement and enhanced self-esteem through the acquisition of new skills. Learning outcomes are acknowledged by pupils and parents. "At the end of the day they go running up the street bursting with pride, showing everybody what they've done. They want everybody to see it [parent]. It makes you feel happy with yourself. [pupil]"

Outcomes for families

Parents have been given a sense of achievement and enhanced self-esteem. "For a parent like me, I've never been creative or confident. It's given me ideas and made me more confident. In other words, it's never too late to learn."

Parents have gained an insight into the school curriculum and a clearer picture of how they can contribute to their children's learning. The workshops have helped to create an understanding of how and what children are taught at school. This in turn has encouraged and helped parents to support their children's education:

"I come here because it is an opportunity to work with my daughter. What I find is that when you make models you can understand the level they are at in the classroom. As a parent it gives me an insight into the school. It also gives me an opportunity to share my skills with my son. It's a marvellous idea."

Many parents are now harnessing this newly found confidence and knowledge. In the past some parents have been frustrated by lack of appropriate skills and understanding. The workshops have undoubtedly addressed this challenge and empowered parents and other carers to support children's learning at home. "It gives you so many ideas for what you can do at home. There's so much potential in junk you'd throw away at home. I now look at everything carefully before throwing it out."

Visitors to any workshop would be quite aware of the full cross-section of family members in attendance. These include pre-school children, an older son or daughter from the local secondary school, through to a substantial number of grandparents.

Many families simply take the opportunity to work together as a unit, for others, it is necessary for child care reasons. In view of the importance currently attached to the value of family life, the potential outcomes from working together in this manner will be

examined more closely in the final evaluation. "You find that parents bring their older children as well. It's a proper family event. It's one way of getting the whole family involved. It gives you a set of family values [parent comment]."

Outcomes for schools

There has been considerable enrichment and extension of the school curriculum. *The project has generated time and status for design and technology work that was not previously possible.* The following quote from a deputy head teacher illustrates the constraints placed by the demands of the National Curriculum on the teaching of the subject in school hours: "I can't do anything like this in school. I haven't the resources or the time. I do a design and technology topic once a year, but there are so many other things that we've also got to do."

The format of the workshops has also stimulated imaginative and creative challenges that are not always possible in a classroom situation. "They are able to use the National Curriculum creatively and extend it around their own interests, for example, the work they did with circuits could never have been done in a classroom."

The impacts of these enhanced learning opportunities are also evident in the early years curriculum.

"In the nursery we have a technology table with instruction boards for making things. When they make things, it's easy to pick out the pupils that come here because there's more creative flair to their work. They are getting a lot out of it."

In addition to developing knowledge and understanding and the practical skills for design and technology, these workshops incorporate many of the *key skills that children need to become effective learners*, namely, problem solving, communication, working with others, application of number, and managing one's own learning. Professional development opportunities are provided for teaching and non-teaching staff, students and parents.

The head teachers have encouraged teaching and non-teaching staff to support the sessions and work alongside a very creative and skilled former design and technology adviser. "It's given me ideas, ideas and ideas, plus the opportunity of meeting parents and getting to know them informally [teacher]."

The workshops have also helped parents in their paid and voluntary work. "It's good for me. I'm a nursery nurse at the hospital. We don't have much money for resources at the

hospital and this has helped me to be more resourceful."

The project has enhanced home, school and community links. Teachers and parents acknowledge that two-way communications have improved by working together, getting to know each other, and communicating in an informal setting:

"It brings parents in on a totally different level. It builds on the school's partnership with parents. Parents and teachers are mixing on a different level [head teacher]."

"There's more partnership between home and school because it's opening up lines of communication [parent]."

"The goodwill and sense of enjoyment that these workshops generate becomes a talking point within the community and enhances the role of the school within the community. It's raising the profile of the school within the community [head teacher]."

It has been encouraging to see the support of governors in some of the schools. It is clear from the comments below that this involvement has benefited the governors and parents alike. It has also been a source of governor recruitment.

"I wish we could have more of these – it's a way of getting to know teachers, pupils and parents [governor]."

"I enjoy it – it's fun – it's not often you get the chance to talk to governors – normally you don't even know who they are [parent]."

"I've got two new governors out of this Club, so it's got to be good [head teacher]."

Why are the membership numbers still going up?

- There is still a high level of commitment and enthusiasm from the project leader, the heads and project teachers in the FEATHERS schools.
- FEATHERS families always receive a warm welcome and we ensure that the resources and equipment are presented in an attractive and accessible way.
- The learning experience of one workshop is used to reinforce the next – building confidence and ensuring progression.
- Activities are appropriate for all age groups – in this way we make sure that everyone, from pre-school children to pensioners, gain a sense of achievement within a relatively short time.

Practical issues

Identified issue

Storage and transport of resources.

Stock control of resources.

Signing in and register of attendance.

Refreshments policy.

Setting up and clearing away.

Insufficient student helpers.

Timing of workshops to ensure maximum attendance.

Proposed action

Each school to store its own supply of consumable materials.

Stock taking sheet to ensure adequate levels of resources.

Introduction of a FEATHERS PASSPORT to be stamped for each session attended.

All schools agreed to serve drinks only at the commencement of the sessions, for health and safety reasons and to minimise costs.

Head teacher commitment to make the hall and resources available in good time prior to the workshop. Procedures to be established for the end of session storage system.

Basford College approached for NNEB students. Workshop schedule also changed to accommodate the university year. FEATHERS marketing leaflet targeted at students to be produced.

Head teachers to ensure that workshops do not clash with other after school activities.

Strategic issues

Identified issue

Attendance, targeting and inclusion – in Year 1 workshop invitations were extended to all pupils and family members.

Pupils attending workshops without family support.

Possible exclusion of parents in employment due to the timings of the workshops (3.30–5.00pm).

Lack of evidence of gender balance (pupils and adults).

Proposed action

Agree criteria for what constitutes a well-attended workshop. Head teachers agreed that greater consideration be given to identifying and targeting pupils and families that would particularly benefit from participating.

Where possible, workshops will be confined to pupils attending in the company of a parent/carer. However, head teachers have the discretion to target individual pupils with a longer term aim to encourage family participation.

Initial timings of 7–9pm considered, but rejected on the basis of being too late for younger members of the family and difficulties encountered by winter weather. The provision of holiday period activities will continue. Yearly 'Feathers Calendar' to be produced and included in 'Feathers Passport'.

Ways to be explored for gathering data and instigating appropriate action.

Sustainability

Need to establish a means of longer term delivery and management of the project.

Funding.

Progress the possibility of establishing an Open College accredited training course for parents and other interested participants who demonstrate the potential to become workshop facilitators.

New Opportunities Fund and other potential funding sources to be explored.

Whole school approach.

The evaluation strategy involving the University of Sheffield will call upon teachers to observe and record the impact of the workshops on pupil performance. Dissemination meeting planned. Schools to explore strategies for involving more teaching and non-teaching staff e.g. rota for attendance.

Need to improve the knowledge, skills and understanding of a) family helpers and b) of student helpers

Explore the possibility of a training session for adult family members only. All students to be provided with a half-day training session and then agree to a contract identifying key areas of responsibility. Nottingham Trent University students to undertake with more in-depth work as part of their course assignments.

Head teacher commitment.

Head teachers committed to promoting a whole school approach to family learning. Workshops to be actively promoted and evaluation information to be provided. Review meetings also to be attended.

Partnerships.

Utilise the expertise of all potential external agencies and organisations e.g. local high schools and the Open College Network.

Transferability. Is this model of family learning valuable and replaceable in other venues, schools or centres?

Formative and summative evaluation to be carried out by Education Extra, the University of Sheffield and key stakeholders in the project.

- By giving people time and space to develop their skills at their own pace and in their own way.
- Having FUN, making sure the workshops have 'user friendly' titles and activities – for example we have used an eccentric wheel to sink the Titanic and a buzzer to announce the arrival of a favourite story!
- Encouraging children to take their models back to school to show in class or at assembly time. This is really beginning to work well.
- Talking to parents/carers and listening to their views. Some parents have never tried or had the opportunity to do the kind of activities we do in the workshops – they say that they now have the confidence to try projects at home with their children.

One Grandad told me "It's wonderful, at last I've got them away from the television and we have fun making things together – the quality of work they produce is amazingly good."

Issues to be addressed in Year 2

Despite the progress achieved in the first year of the project, there is still scope for development. The issues identified so far will be addressed during the second year and these are divided into two categories – practical and strategic. There were a number of practical difficulties that needed to be sorted out in the early stages of the project and these have either been, or soon will be resolved, as will be noted below.

The OCN accredited course

This will be starting in the summer term and has just been advertised to schools. The outcome of this and the PASSPORT system introduced in 1999/2000 will be evaluated in the end of Year 2 report due out in September.

People attending this course will be given an opportunity to:

- Explore and develop their knowledge of the similarities and differences between materials and recognise that materials are chosen for specific uses according to their properties.
- Work with a range of materials including paper and card, wood, fabrics mouldable substances and items that can be assembled to make products, e.g. construction kits.
- Investigate how the working characteristics of materials can be changed to suit different purposes, e.g. cutting, folding and joining paper or heating and shaping sheet materials.
- Develop practical skills including
 - selecting appropriate tools and techniques when working with a specific material, e.g. a junior hacksaw to cut wood or applying heat to fix colours on fabric
 - different ways to measure, mark out, cut and shape a range of materials, e.g. finding the centre of a circle or using a drill to make a hole in wood

- ways of joining and combining materials, in both temporary and permanent positions, e.g. plaiting wool or using card triangles to hold wood securely
- applying finishing techniques appropriate to the materials being used and the purpose of the model, e.g. cladding a box in self adhesive foil or sanding wood.
- Gain a working knowledge of how to construct a simple circuit and switch – and ways to test a circuit to find wiring faults.
- Develop their knowledge and understanding of how to use simple joints that allow movement and other basic mechanisms, including wheels and axles.
- Use skills that have been developed as part of their occupation or through hobbies and membership of adult education classes.
- Draw on their own experiences and course activities to develop their knowledge of the different stages of the technology process.
- Gather information from the Internet and other sources and share their findings by producing 'teaching' aids and other materials.
- Clarify their ideas through discussion with the course tutor, other course members, their children and other interested groups.
- Share practical activities with their children and with members of the FEATHERS clubs.

Conclusion

The Boots Company have made an active response to the Government's challenge of raising standards. Initial findings in the Year 1 report give an exciting indication of the initiative's potential to enhance educational achievement and the quality of family and community life.

The success of the project has been acknowledged locally, nationally and at an international design and technology conference. However, it is recognised that this is still a pilot project with many practical and strategic issues to be resolved over the coming two years. The hope is that FEATHERS will still be flying high this time next year!