

Tiny Tasters: Falmouth University Starts Early!

A growing body of national and international research shows that ‘starting early’ to help young children understand the career opportunities and pathways open to them is vital in broadening horizons and building the aspirations that will help them to thrive in their school career and beyond.ⁱ With children fixing unconscious biases around job roles and their personal suitability for them as early as 5-7 years old, leading if unchallenged to the development of career limiting stereotypes by age of 9-13, the case for employers and educational institutions to engage with primary school children and challenge their assumptions is strong.ⁱⁱ

Falmouth University have been doing just that in their development of ‘Tiny Taster’ creative engagements for the upper primary phase. Senior Outreach Officer Aby Underhill-Carey and her team are currently supporting a number of primary schools within the Start Small, Dream Big project to deliver on careers-related learning and have offered rich learning experiences across the academic year to help children make links between the skills they are developing at school and future opportunities.

Myth Busting

The team collaborates with teachers to design a bespoke engagement that fits a curriculum topic or school priority, but one aspect they like to deliver at all schools is a ‘What is a university?’ session. After hearing from their visitor(s) about their personal experiences of where and why they went to university, and talking about some famous examples, the children look at a map of all the universities in England. ‘This always blows their minds’, says Aby, ‘especially when we go on to talk about universities all over the world and the option of going away to study if they’d like’. The children also learn what a prospectus is and how to find specific information through fun search games. ‘Some children home in on schools subjects they enjoy such as Art or Geography while others explore the broader subject links finding courses in Graphic Design or Geology for example. The aim is to help them see there is a huge breadth of courses out there,’ says Aby, ‘this is really helpful in giving them a more nuanced understanding of where the skills, subjects and hobbies they enjoy could take them.’ The team reports that the session always generates lots of questions which in turn challenge the misconceptions children often hold about university: especially unhelpful ideas they might have about a ‘type’ of person who goes to university.

Sustainable resource and focus

Following their ‘What is a university?’ session, children then engage in hands on activity. The team draws on colleague and student expertise within the university to come up with tailored sessions, with real world relevance, suited to pupils in years 5 and 6. The sessions are designed to encourage collaborative working, creative problem solving and self-efficacy using resources that are easy to obtain, often with a sustainability focus. At St Stephen Churchtown Academy recently, children in year 5 worked on an architecture challenge, ‘Building on a

Budget, where children had to follow a design brief, think sustainably and consider profit to build different structures. Working effectively as a team was key to making the step-by-step plans to achieve their goal. After a break, the same children then worked with Sarah, a textiles graduate, in a collagraph printmaking workshop. This sustainable form of printing allowed children to choose items from a box of used materials to make a printing block. They talked about what a print is, looked at some examples and, as luck would have it, their teacher was even wearing a repeat print top which showed the pupils the process and skills they were developing in a commercial context.

Embedding the experience

Linking a visitor activity to a curriculum topic is an impactful way to help children appreciate the relevance of the visit and apply learning and develop confidence in a new context. At Pennoweth Primary school, the lead teacher requested an activity from the team that would link to their curriculum, to allow children to use their knowledge about climate change. Three classes of year 5 and 6 children split into teams to design a product that would fix a problem linked to climate change and habitat threats in frozen kingdoms (such as failing harvests, melting ice caps and rising sea levels). Aby and the team were impressed by how innovative the children's solutions were. One group particularly struck them for simultaneously tackling water shortage in one location and rising sea levels in another; 'They decided to make a huge pipeline from recycled plastics, initially planning to use rainwater then revising the idea to utilise the rising sea level'. After a break, the children worked on a second challenge, designing a sustainable festival. They looked at examples of local festivals before deciding on a festival theme of their own. The children designed everything from music to sport festivals and enjoyed planning an eco-friendly approach including compost toilets, solar panels, cycle routes in and more!

'These are some of my favourite activity days,' says Aby, 'some of the questions and solutions the kids come up with are phenomenal. This is why we need to start early; the positivity and creativity we see really shows there's purpose and impact for us as a university in bringing primary schools into our outreach network'

Promoting universal 'tech aspirations'

And the Falmouth team have some more exciting activities planned for the coming term. At the Beacon ACE Academy shortly, year 6 will be taking part in a gaming workshop. They will be game designers for a day in an activity created and delivered by a current Falmouth student studying game art. Pupils will learn the 'gaming pipeline' and design a character with a 'unique mechanic'. They'll also explore sound creation in a 'Foley' workshop; the art of adding sound to moving image during post-production. 'They'll use everyday objects to generate their sound effects,' Aby explains. 'It's important that children realise they can get involved in designing for games and film now and in the future without needing expensive specialist equipment and limitless funds.'

Impact

- **Developing confidence and self-esteem in less academic pupils;** At one school, where groups had been split by ability, the teacher commented that the lower ability group really thrived. While a higher ability group overcomplicated their steps, the lower ability team kept it simple, communicated well to divide task responsibility and were really absorbed in the moment. What's more, this team and other timelier finishers went on to encourage the group that had overcomplicated their approach.
- **Dispelling misconceptions about university pathways;** Visiting young pupils gave the team an opportunity to bust some myths about university; the team was able to help children revise their ideas such as: You can't go to university if you have dyslexia; you have to be rich; a full time course is 9-5; you can't stay at home and go to Uni. Children were also introduced to unexpected places you can study for a degree to show that university doesn't have to be a classroom.
- **Raising awareness of realistic opportunities;** The search games using university prospectuses helped pupils to explore new possibilities without squashing their career dreams. One pupil commented, 'Okay, I want to be a footballer, what's the best degree for me to do?' This opened a conversation about courses in physiotherapy and sports rehabilitation. Children aiming to be Youtubers learned that only a small number succeed in becoming famous; they had the opportunity to speak to the team about alternative routes that might interest them such as e-sports and live streaming courses (in which students learn useful skills that can be applied across a number of different sectors). Given that over 100,000 young people are currently entering the labour market to find there is no demand for the job they have been working towards, helping young children to broaden their ideas through authentic advice could be key in averting a frustrating mismatch in the longer term.ⁱⁱⁱ

Careers Development Framework Aims:

- Being willing to take on challenges that help them to grow
- Making a step-by-step plan to enable them to achieve something
- Being aware that choice and opportunity make careers possible
- Recording and commenting on what they have experienced and achieved

Skills Builder Framework Essential Skills:

- Problem Solving
- Teamwork
- Leadership



ⁱ The Careers & Enterprise Company, (2021) [What Works? Career related Learning in Primary Schools](#)

ⁱⁱ Drawing the Future (2018) Education and Employers, (2021) [Starting Early; Building the foundation for success](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Education and Employers, (2020) Disconnected: [Career aspirations and jobs in the UK](#)