

# You can't be serious! Support career-related learning in primary schools?

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## Shouldn't children have their childhood?

But you can't stop them thinking about growing up. Natural maturation does not wait for 13 years before engaging with some of the key roles that young people will occupy. It is evident from play that during early and primary years children are developing impressions of the adult world they don't yet belong to, anticipating their role relationship with it, and building internal constructs about it. This includes the world of work. Why is this not attracting appropriate attention from policy makers and practitioners?

## Practitioners

As far as practitioners are concerned, it is not an entirely neglected area: there are teachers in primary schools building some of this thinking into their curriculum planning and development.

Earlier this year, the Head teacher of Hilltop Infants School, Wickford, Essex, Mrs Celia Ebrahimi<sup>1</sup>, said:

**'We have been very aware that although many of our pupils achieve well academically, they do not appreciate the choices and options that are available to them. Few of our parents were able to access further/higher education courses and many of the children see themselves following the same paths as their parents/carers ... we wanted to raise awareness about choices and options for the future before children's views have become fixed, and to challenge stereotypes ... we wanted children to realise that everyone can enjoy activities that they might have previously thought were only for boys or for girls.'**<sup>2</sup>

As a result of this thinking, the school set up a Young Engineers Club in association with SELEX Sensors and Airborne System (previously BAe Systems) for six-year-olds. The objectives were to:

- enable children to know they have many choices ahead of them not determined by gender or class;

- help them to find out about more kinds of work than their family might think about;
- raise aspirations - help children to understand they do not have to do what parents/siblings do now;
- show them that they have skills and abilities that they can use in the future;
- encourage them to value themselves, their abilities and potential, and to value others similarly.

This was not careers education for 6 and 7 year olds, but it was concerned with laying some foundations that could be usefully used in that later learning. It built confidence in children across the ability range, and helped them to develop skills involved in communication, working in teams, leading, listening and seeking advice. This was not about jobs; it was more about transferable skills – the absence of which would severely limit the ability of children to function in any future organisation.

Most teachers in primary schools readily recognise that even without any adult interventions, children constantly assemble impressions of the world of work. A lot of children's play anticipates work, as they act out work roles and practise work-related skills. Their attitudes to the world outside school are also being formed through the impact of the media, and the views and values of the people at home and around them. As children's constructs about work, the working world and their role-relationship with it are developed, the foundations are laid for their later learning. Some of the early learning is clearly a good foundation - "I'm going to play with a computer when I grow up"; but much reflects a young mind in the making - "I'm going to have a band when I grow up"; and can include constructs that might be difficult to challenge later – "Nobody in our house goes to work" (McGowan, 2000). Broadening children's horizons and experiences can support the development of rich and positive constructs about work, thinking that will enable and extend future choice. And it does not involve asking teachers to do a great deal more – very largely this is about doing the same things, but a bit differently.

What happens if children don't have enough useful learning to go on? Good careers education, advice and guidance 13-19 can help to increase motivation and raise aspirations; but teachers and personal advisers say much of their work is concerned with unpicking unhelpful 'learning' that young people bring to future planning, e.g. "I'm not

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<sup>2</sup> First published in Newscheck November 2005 "I want to be a pop star – and an engineer in my spare time" Barbara McGowan

that good”, “I expect I’ll do what my sister done – she’s OK hairdressing”, “I probably won’t get a job – you don’t need one, do you?”

Young people need to be inspired and excited about their future; laying some foundations for this in primary school is to enable them to perceive that there may be many more options accessible to them than may emerge from their immediate family and community setting. Within three years of leaving primary school someone will talk to them about choices at 14+ - decisions that have career consequences. The decisions they make will be influenced by what they, and their parents, think they already ‘know’ – about themselves, about work and about the job roles open to them.

## Policymakers

So what about the policymakers? We have a National Framework of learning outcomes for CEG that relate to young people in Key Stages 3, 4, and post-16 (DfES, 2003). Why don’t we have one for the Foundation Stage, and Key Stages 1 and 2? Using the same format, the following outcomes from *First Impressions: career-related learning in primary schools* (DfES, 2001) might be a useful ‘starter for ten’. This is not intended to be a definitive list, but is offered as a starting point to stimulate discussion about ‘What are the career learning needs of children of primary age?’ and ‘What outcomes are/should we be helping them to work towards?’

Foundation Stage	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2
<b>Self-development</b>	<b>Self-development</b>	<b>Self-development</b>
<p>Pupils need to learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continue to be excited, interested and motivated to learn</li> <li>• be confident to try new activities, initiate ideas and speak in a familiar group</li> <li>• have a developing awareness of their own needs, views and feelings and be sensitive to the needs, views and feelings of others</li> <li>• interact with others, negotiating plans and activities and taking turns in conversation</li> </ul>	<p>Pupils need to learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognise and take pride in their achievements</li> <li>• develop confidence in their own abilities</li> <li>• develop communication skills – listen to others and respond appropriately</li> <li>• be sensitive to needs and feelings of others and share fairly</li> <li>• express personal preferences and identify a personal goal or target for improvement</li> <li>• develop skills to work in a group or alone to complete a task satisfactorily</li> <li>• value themselves and see worth in others</li> </ul>	<p>Pupils need to learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have a developing sense of their own strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>• are able to identify what they are good at and what skills they need to develop</li> <li>• are able to co-operate with each other and work in a team</li> <li>• talk and listen to adults other than teachers in a variety of situations</li> <li>• recognise and use opportunities when they arise</li> </ul>

Foundation Stage	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2
<p><b>Career exploration</b></p> <p>Pupils need to learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use language to imagine, recreate roles and experiences</li> <li>• use their imagination in play, role play and stories</li> </ul>	<p><b>Career exploration</b></p> <p>Pupils need to learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand adults take on different roles</li> <li>• investigate traditional and non-traditional roles in the home and school</li> <li>• are aware of a variety of occupations</li> <li>• through simulation, role-play and visits, imagine doing different jobs</li> <li>• gain increasing independence and be increasingly able to cope with change</li> </ul>	<p><b>Career exploration</b></p> <p>Pupils need to learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• show a growing awareness of the world of work</li> <li>• have knowledge of a wide range of occupations and how these may change over time</li> <li>• begin to develop concepts and a vocabulary to describe ideas about work</li> <li>• are aware of the importance of health and safety</li> <li>• understand what is meant by stereotypes</li> <li>• are developing broad horizons about the world of work</li> </ul>
<p><b>Career management</b></p>	<p><b>Career management</b></p> <p>Pupils need to learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ask for help when they need it</li> <li>• organise, plan and record work which the teacher has asked them to do</li> <li>• demonstrate independence in choosing an activity or resource</li> <li>• manage their own physical needs</li> <li>• behave appropriately in front of others</li> <li>• adjust to new situations with ease</li> </ul>	<p><b>Career management</b></p> <p>Pupils need to learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• draw on the help and support available to them</li> <li>• make simple action plans and carry them through to completion</li> <li>• show self-reliance in finishing work</li> <li>• make reasoned decisions and choices based on information they have gathered</li> <li>• understand what is meant by transition and can cope with preparing for and making changes</li> </ul>

Needs will always be mediated through context and locality, and can only ever be defined by those who work with children and young people. The National Framework is offered as guidance, the ultimate arbiter of its value are those who work with it, adopting or adapting it to the needs of the young people they seek to support, in curriculum and other settings. The same needs to be true of the above.

Most of the factors unconsciously affecting the career choice of young people are in place by the time they are 13-years-old. This earlier work ensures that children have opportunities to develop positive constructs about the world of work, and experience learning as relevant. It helps them to build sufficient building blocks for future life and

work. Introducing contexts from the world of work to support the curriculum brings relevance into learning, enhances the experience and makes it more likely that children will use what they have learned, both now and later. Children now will need to be able to deal with more change in their working lives than any of us to date have had to encounter. Children need help to prepare for that kind of future. The price for not doing so is too high – for young people, for our society and for the future economy.

Are we about to miss an opportunity to support this work? Children's trusts bring together all services for children and young people in an area, underpinned by the Children Act 2004 duty to co-operate on improving outcomes for all children and young people. These are focused around:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

“The five outcomes are universal ambitions for every child and young person, whatever their background or circumstances. Improving outcomes for all children and young people underpins all of the development and work within children's trusts ... the evidence shows clearly that educational achievement is the most effective route out of poverty”<sup>3</sup>.

Educational achievement is motivated by aspiration – to succeed, to move on, and to reach goals that may not have been envisaged before. At primary school, what children see and hear and experience helps to shape their beliefs and attitudes. If children are enabled to pick up that the adult world can offer them all sorts of chances and choices then that is how they will behave when they are older. If they don't, then parental wishes, careers education and guidance at secondary school, and policy initiatives to create opportunities for learning and work will have only a limited impact on their thinking, actions and decisions (McGowan, 2001a). This is not how it is intended to be, but without some policy support for this learning too many young people will slip through the safety net of learning.

The responsibility for the education and welfare of all children and young people aged 0-19 falls now within one unified structure. Included within that remit is the responsibility for careers work – support for careers education and guidance (CEG) within 13-19 institutions and the provision of impartial career information, advice and guidance (IAG) from a source external to them. This latter may continue to be delivered by a Connexions service, or whatever it has metamorphosed into. In many instances this will continue to be based on a partnership role between the Local Authority and a careers company. This means that in some areas the ability to offer support for this area of learning in primary schools is already present. There are a number of professionals in career companies who have this expertise, but have found it increasingly difficult to find resources for it within the Connexions' agenda. Local Authority Children's Trusts have the opportunity to change that from April 2008 – and to begin planning for its development and resource allocation in 2007.

There are some challenges:

- Who in children's trusts will take up the responsibility for this work?

- Will QCA recognise that this work is a critical foundation for careers work 13-19 and that without it resources for this older age group are unnecessarily used in remedial learning?
- Will DfES respond to this evident need and enable resources?
- How and when can this be embedded within the policy framework of the primary strategy?

Change can be uncomfortable, and challenges can provoke negative responses. Worse than both of these is apathy – leave it long enough and it will go away. Leave it long enough and another generation of children will have been denied the opportunity to access future life chances that at present appear largely invisible to them. We need to get serious!

## References

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## Notes

The list of published resources in *Opening Doors: career-related learning for primary and middle schools* has now been updated and is available electronically on the NICEC website: [www.nicec.org.uk/publications/publications](http://www.nicec.org.uk/publications/publications) (2006)

The CRAC Information Guide *You can't be serious – career-related learning in primary schools!* is available from NICEC, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX on receipt of a SAE.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Every Child Matters: change for children* <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/outcomes/>