

Employability in St. Mary's Primary School

Why did you get involved in Employability?

I believe that children learn best when learning is connected, interactive, practical and enjoyable and when they have opportunities to make choices and decisions about their learning. Rather than the transmission of knowledge by the teacher, pupils should be provided with frequent opportunities to find out and manage information for themselves. Two years ago I was involved in a CCEA Employability Pilot "*Make it Real Game*" for Primary 7 pupils in which the pupils and I thoroughly enjoyed. Having benefited personally from the work I wanted to remain involved in future initiatives concerning Employability. Education for Employability gives pupils opportunities for learning to be more relevant in their lives; they are able to make connections with what they learn and they are given opportunities to actively contribute to their learning.

In what ways is Education for Employability relevant in St. Mary's Primary School?

Education for Employability is extremely relevant in St. Mary's Primary School. Our aims in teaching and learning is about inspiring young people to have belief and determination to follow their ideas, to take risks, and to understand how to live and work in today's constantly changing world. The aim of Education for Employability in our school is to ensure that all young people develop the personal qualities, skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes which will give them a strong foundation for lifelong learning and work.

Is this something extra, a new subject in the primary curriculum?

Employability is not something new in primary schools. Some teachers have been working to develop enterprising children for many years using many techniques. Employability should not be seen as an additional subject or an 'add on' to the curriculum. Instead, it is best viewed as an 'approach' to teaching and learning. This approach engages learners especially when pupils are given a real context with a relevant purpose when participating in enterprising activities.

What is the children's response to Employability projects?

By using the enterprise approach, I found, the pupils benefited immensely. The pupils had ownership of their project, they could influence how they learn, and they had a real purpose for their learning. I found that from using the enterprise approach to topic based work; pupils developed their resourcefulness, ingenuity as well as learning to be responsible for their actions. By forming company group's pupils had opportunities to lead a group, admit to successes and failures, find solutions, take initiative and be accountable for all decisions. Many of the activities undertaken in the project were designed to boost confidence and self esteem, and to challenge the pupil's current thinking and attitudes. Pupils were able to set goals, make the most of opportunities and have fun. When working on the Employability project pupils had opportunities to make informed choices, listen to other people's views and make predictions. Pupils enjoy thinking 'outside the box', generating ideas, thinking ideas through and finding solutions under pressure. Pupils were able to sell themselves, negotiate, manage time, prioritise, delegate and plan. Most importantly pupils realised that they could achieve more and reach their goals more quickly when working as a team. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively in order to successfully complete goals. Pupils also developed core skills like questioning skills, listening to others, challenging others, empathising and making opinions clear. The enterprise approach makes learning fun, stimulating, exciting and rewarding for both pupil and teacher.

Where have you got your support from?

I received support firstly from the Principal, Staff and Parents at St. Mary's Primary school, CCEA, public services in my particular case the Fire and Rescue Service, The Southern Education and Library Board- Careers and Employability Section, The Business Education Partnership (Dungannon) and DMS (Ireland).

Is this a whole school initiative in St. Mary's Primary School?

The Education for Employability is a whole school initiative. Initially the Employability project started in Primary 5 as part of the CCEA Pilot Programme. Now St. Mary's Primary School hopes to provide at least one enterprising experience in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Pupils will have additional opportunities to engage in enterprising activities with CCEA's "Enterprise Storysack- Anything's Possible", (Years 3 & 4) and "Out of This World" resource (Years 6 & 7).

What would Employability look like in the classroom?

Employability in the classroom can take many forms. It is child centred. It provides a cross curricular methodology for learning and develops life-long learning skills, attitudes and competencies. A large part of Employability is about how teachers and students approach their lessons in an enterprising way. Employability can be used to develop specific areas of the curriculum in an enterprising way or as part of an enterprise project. Within the classroom the pupils are able to turn their ideas into reality.

What would you say to other schools and teachers who are interested in developing Employability in their schools?

For a long time Employability or enterprise has had overtones of being something that only involves business and profit! In reality Employability and Enterprise is more to do with developing skills, attitudes and values. Employability in school should involve learners to 'become more enterprising' in the way that they think. Employability is about giving pupils the opportunities to develop core competencies or attributes. By using enterprise we can inspire our young people to have the belief and determination to follow through their ideas, to take risks, and to understand how to live and work in today's constantly changing world.