



Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Empowering Young People: A school project

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Aims



Use a school-based outreach project to:

- Challenge subject-based gender stereotypes
- Empower young people to lead and take responsibility
- Provide opportunities to ease transition to secondary school
- Provide opportunities for young people to encounter positive role models from a variety of careers

Background



- Poor representation of women in STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics)
- In UK in 2018 women formed 22% of the core STEM workforce



We were aware that women were poorly represented in STEM careers in the UK in 2018 only 22% of the core STEM workforce was female. To address this, we designed a project to target Y9 girls and Skirting Science was born. Ref: <https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/statistics/2018-workforce-statistics/>

Background



Skirting science has involved over 2250 girls over the past 11 years

In 2019, we were awarded the High Sheriff of Somerset's Award for "great and valuable service to the community"



To address this, we designed a project to target Y9 girls and Skirting Science was born. We chose to target Y9 girls because at that time girls chose their GCSE options in Y10. Skirting Science focused on STEM careers that the girls might not be aware of and provided hands on workshops.

Background to Sparking Science



Is year 9 (age 14) too late to challenge the stereotypes?

Despite our intervention, we realised that there were still strongly held stereotypical views about women and men's jobs. A view reinforced by media, society and often pupils' parents.

Research shows that these stereotypes are often formed before or around the age of puberty and so before Y9. Sparking Science was designed to challenge these stereotypes before they even form.

Ref: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news/2018/jan/childrens-career-aspirations-limited-gender-stereotypes-and-socio-economic-background>

Sparking Science



Funding for STEM outreach projects

Sparking Science



- Age group?
- Gender?
- Involvement of older students as ambassadors/mentors/teachers
- Involvement of professional women

In devising Sparking Science we considered a number of questions.

Sparking Science



Typical outline of the project

	Science (girls)	Dance (boys)
Session 1 (45 minutes)	Why do snails and slugs need slime?	Introduction to street dance
Session 2 (45 minutes)	Lungs and breathing	Choreography
Break	Meeting with Soroptimists and refreshments	
Session 3 (45 minutes)	Making a timer challenge	Performance development
Showcase of dance performance and final summary of the session		

Primary School Staff were given a pack to use at school so the students could teach each other what they learnt.

Sparking Science can target a number of subject combinations Science and Dance were the first combination we tried.

Sparking Science



Take two subjects which are stereotypically seen as gendered

Stereotypically female for the UK	Stereotypically male for the UK
Literature	Science
Languages	Computing
Dance	Mathematics
Art	Resistant Materials (Technology)

Designing a version for your school



- Find teachers in the Secondary School from target subjects
- Involving Feeder Primary Schools provides transition opportunities
- Half-day sessions within school hours works well
- Having both sessions run simultaneously is beneficial to the Primary School
- Training older students to run the sessions provides leadership opportunities for them
- Upon returning to school the year 4 students can then teach each other what they have learned

Soroptimists
& School staff

Sixth form
students

Year 8
students

Year 4
students

Impact on students



Girls feel empowered to lead (both the primary students and the older secondary ambassadors)

Form a relationship with the subject before stereotypes start to develop

Engagement with the subject

Start seeing the subject as “for women”

Encounter positive role models both in the older students and in the professional women

More likely to seek out opportunities to learn more about the subject

With thanks to...

