

# Role on!

A 'mini city' is informing children about career choices and enhancing role play at one Sheffield school. *Nicole Weinstein* reports

**A** chocolate-making factory, a window-cleaning company and a courier service are just some of the role-play scenarios that have been set up at Arbourthorne Community Primary School following a visit to the child-sized city KidZania in west London.

'Children in the Reception class were so taken by the medical courier service – where they had to follow instructions to deliver life-saving blood to the hospital on a trolley within a set time – that we decided to incorporate the idea of a courier service into our daily provision,' explains head teacher Vanessa Langley, who also sits on the KidZania think tank.

'Equipped with a kitchen trolley, a timer, a clipboard and a role-play outfit, children now run errands around the school, such as delivering the register to the office, through the courier service. It's a simple enhancement that we have made, following on from their keen interest in this activity at KidZania.'

## ASPIRATION

'From inspiration to aspiration' is the slogan of Mexican 'educational entertainment' company KidZania, which opened in London in 2015 and is one of 24 such cities worldwide. This indoor centre boasts an attractive plaza, pedestrian areas, a road and more than 60 shops and businesses in which children can choose to work. Jobs range from learning to fly aeroplanes with real flight simulators to working on a maternity ward.

Children enter the jobs alone, without their accompanying adult, and they are briefed on their role by KidZania 'supervisors'. While the adult watches through the window – or even steps outside the mini city into the Westfield Centre, the shopping centre in which the site is located – the children spend on average 15 to 20 minutes engrossed in role-

playing their chosen profession, often taking it very seriously.

'It's a totally safe environment,' explains Mrs Langley. 'And children love the freedom they get from being able to move from one job to another, earning Kidzos, the currency in the city, and then later either spending it in the various shops where they can make smoothies, wraps, cereal bars or burgers, or depositing it into a bank account where they get their own credit card.'

Each child wears an electronic tracking bracelet throughout the standard four-hour visit, and children over the age of seven can be dropped off by parents at the entrance to the city.

## INSPIRATION

'Children can only aspire to what they know exists,' explains KidZania's education director, Dr Ger Graus OBE. He continues, 'Sixty per cent of all school visits are from deprived areas across England, and their main drive is to use it as a career-awareness exercise and as an aspirational tool – for children aged four up to 14.'

'We also support children with special educational needs. We tailor visits to meet the specific needs of the children, whether they are visually or audio impaired, autistic or in wheelchairs, and we work with local special schools who come in to train our staff.'

Many of the activities are 'partnered with' (i.e. sponsored by) corporate businesses, which has caused some controversy. These partners include British Airways, Renault, Cadbury, Mothercare, The Early Learning Centre and Alder Hay Children's Hospital.

Dr Graus explains, 'Some activities have no partner yet – such as the latest window-cleaning activity, which was set up following children's demand. At the end of the day, we want the children to be engaged



**Above: taking part in a pit stop at KidZania**  
**Right: in the mini city's maternity ward**



## MORE INFORMATION

- Welcome to KidZania London, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjyHPdN20tE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjyHPdN20tE)
- KidZania interactive tour, <http://london.kidzania.com/en-uk/t/360-virtual-tour>
- Teacher resources – pre and post-visit, [http://london.kidzania.com/en-uk/teacher\\_resources/educational\\_value](http://london.kidzania.com/en-uk/teacher_resources/educational_value)
- Careers information, [www.plotr.co.uk/careers/worlds/kidzania-London](http://www.plotr.co.uk/careers/worlds/kidzania-London)

– and from an educational perspective, that's my main purpose. If we are really serious about giving the next generation a voice, then we have to listen to them, and when we listen to them, we have to act.'

Two children from each of the 11 schools across England chosen by KidZania to become ambassadors for the London 'city' (of which Arbourthorne is one) sit on a junior think tank and meet twice a year. At the meetings, they share thoughts on the KidZania experience – what was exciting and memorable, as well as what didn't go as well as they



expected – with the view to helping the centre improve.

With the number of KidZania's worldwide centres set to double in the next five years, it is aiming to take on a wider policy remit and a greater role in informing children about their future choices.

Discussing the findings of its latest research involving data on 61,000 children in England, matched against Government indices of deprivation,

Dr Graus explains, 'It highlights that deprivation affects children's aspirations and goals, as does gender – these are multi-dimensional issues. It also shows that boys choose activities above their age range and girls choose activities below their age range, which point to confidence issues.

'We are calling for a national consultation based on a set of proposals that we want to present at the Bett Education show in 2018, saying that things should change. For example, children's awareness of their future, including possible career choices, should start from the age of four, not 14. What we need is to be building a creative approach to social mobility.'

### BACK IN THE CLASSROOM

The Cadbury's Chocolate Factory activity at KidZania was a hit among the under-fives at Arbourthorne Community Primary School. Danielle Pollitt, Foundation Phase leader, says, 'After the visit, we noticed that children were starting to represent their experience as chocolatiers in their play. We enhanced their play by adding resources such as aprons, chocolate boxes, wrappers and playdough to represent the chocolate, and mark-making materials. The learning that came from it was phenomenal.

'Through their role play, they learnt about the different shapes of chocolates, they weighed them out and wrapped them up, they looked at adverts about chocolate and discussed the language of size, shape and quantity – and as the play progressed, they set up a café serving



**Top to bottom: Children at Arbourthorne 'working' as couriers; Wesco's Bosch Workbench; TTS's Assorted Wooden Tool Collection and Role Play Construction Worker's Hat; and Curious Fox Company's Child's Writing Belt**



chocolates and shared them out carefully onto plates for the customers.'

### REPEAT VISITS

Arbourthorne children can look forward to more visits to KidZania. 'One of the reasons we keep going back,' explains Mrs Langley, 'is because we have a high percentage of children on Pupil Premium, and for us, this is an ideal opportunity to use the funding in a way that gives children opportunities to be curious about what's out there in the world, trying out jobs that they didn't know existed.

'For those with behaviour and emotional challenges, the familiarity aspect is key, and it's great to see them gaining more confidence.'

In the school's Foundation Stage Unit, teachers provide role-play opportunities, but Mrs Langley says, 'To supplement it with something that is real life, or an experience like KidZania, takes it one step further.

'To be four years old and play with babies in life-size cots with good-quality resources in a maternity ward really makes children feel like they are playing the part. We try to emulate these experiences back at school, but nothing beats the real thing – or as close to it as you can get.' ■

## RESOURCES

Visits that give children real, first-hand experiences can significantly broaden their horizons. Julian Grenier, head teacher at Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre in north London, says, 'All too often, we want children to play at things without first making sure they have enough experience and knowledge.

'It would be for a practitioner to make their own decision about whether a visit to a commercial venue like KidZania, or a local business like a car wash, will be the best way to catalyse children's play. But one thing is for sure – high-quality role play doesn't just happen naturally, it needs careful preparation and support from practitioners, both in terms of resourcing, and in making sure children have rich, first-hand experiences.'

### RICH EXPERIENCES

For ideas on role-play resources for 'people who help us' and shopping, see 'For real' and 'Shop around' at [www.nurseryworld.co.uk](http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk).

Here are some resources to support tradespeople role play:

#### Builders

- Healdswood Smaller Mini Skip, £75; Highway Builder's Yard, £359.99; Lewis's Lightweight Softwood Bricks, £39.99, all from [www.cosydirect.com](http://www.cosydirect.com).
- Role Play Construction Worker's Hats (4pk), £16.99; Role Play Foam House Building Bricks, £59.95; Assorted Wooden Tool Collection, £39.95, all from [www.tts-group.co.uk](http://www.tts-group.co.uk).
- For younger children, try the My First Tool Bag, £15.99, or the Carpenters

Workbench, £19.99, both from [www.reflectionsonlearning.co.uk](http://www.reflectionsonlearning.co.uk); or the Bosch Workbench, £66.60, from [www.wesco-eshop.com](http://www.wesco-eshop.com). Or try the Child's Writing Belt, £17.95, from [www.curiousfoxcompany.co.uk](http://www.curiousfoxcompany.co.uk).

#### Postal workers

- Post Office/Shop Sentry Play Store, £225; and Posties Bag, £10.99, both from [www.cosydirect.com](http://www.cosydirect.com); Post Box, £79.99, from [www.reflectionsonlearning.co.uk](http://www.reflectionsonlearning.co.uk).

#### Hairdressers

- Hairdressing Kit (20pk), £14.79; Hair Dressing and Make Up Head, £10.99; Hairdressing Mirrors (2pk), £10.95, all from [www.cosydirect.com](http://www.cosydirect.com).

#### Costumes

- Maxi Pack of Costumes 'Professions', £188.40, from [www.wesco-eshop.com](http://www.wesco-eshop.com).