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**Discoveries on the shore**

by Dr Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi

Teachers and primary school often look to the local community for support, whether that be trips to the local museum, a visit to a business close by or collaborations with other educational establishments. With this in mind, since 2014, Professor John Plunkett from the University of Exeter and I have been working with primary schools in Devon to do exactly that – collaborate with local schools to inspire creativity and engage children in their local environment.

Over the past year, Devon primary pupils at key stage 2 have enjoyed breathing in the unbeatable seaside air while taking part in a host of activities related to all areas of the curriculum. They have been on rock pool rambles, explored mystery seaside objects and created stories and pastel drawings inspired by the coastline. Throughout, the pupils have learnt about the Victorian fascination with natural history, a passion that has been more than matched by their own excitement about the seaside.

**Inspired by the Victorians**

The 'Science at the aside' project was motivated by the many Victorian writers and naturalists who flocked to the Devon coast in the nineteenth century. Professor Plunkett and I were awarded a grant from North Devon Fishery Local Action Group (FLAG) in 2013 and, with help from our respective universities, the project has been growing ever since. This past year the project worked with 15 primary schools and has brought around 1,000 pupils to the seaside.

School workshops were taught by PhD students to develop ideas about the significance and value of the pupils' local seaside through art and creative writing. We found ourselves in a new world of key stage 2 learning outcomes, national curriculum objectives and the challenge of translating our research into a two or three-hour workshop suitable for years 3 to 6 pupils. Could we relate the Victorian passions for collecting and natural history to the children's own curiosity about the seaside? The early Victorian tourists visiting Devon often described, or drew the specimens they collected and we wanted to replicate this mixture of art, literature and science. How exactly can you write about biodiversity? How can you describe some of the weird and wonderful creatures that live on the coast?

Working with primary school children across Devon in this way has been a steep learning curve but hugely rewarding; they were full of wonderful, imaginative ideas. Not only did they gain a huge amount from their day, it was clear that they had a passion for our coastline as well – something that was central to our initial research. Our long-term goal is for our activity to become a permanent part of the curriculum at all primary schools in Devon and hopefully across the UK one day. The next stage of the project has already commenced with workshops scheduled to take place throughout this academic year with an additional line up of 12 new schools.