

Welcome to As It Is! I'm June Simms in Washington.

On our show today, we hear about college students who have come up with an imaginative way to increase creativity among children.

Also, tennis, badminton and table tennis are some of only a few sports in which men and women compete on the same team. Rarely does this happen in American-style football. In fact, many school districts in the United States bar girls from playing football.

But today, we hear about an American high school where three girls have joined what is normally an all-male sport. We begin with that report from Avi Arditti.

Girls a Rare Sight on Boys' Football Team

Football season has begun at schools across the United States. This year, one high school football team is a little different than most others. It is the one from TC Williams in Alexandria, Virginia. They have Brianna, Tiffany and Josie on the team. Head coach Dennis Randolph says he did not object when the unusual request came his way.

“About 25 girls that have said you know ‘hey we want to play football,’ and I say ‘well come on out.’ But they don’t show up because this really is not for everybody. It takes a special person to come out here and play football. Tiffany and Brianna and Josie are atypical.”

Brianna Smith is a kicker. This is her third year on the TC Williams team. She once played soccer, but her father asked her to try football. At first, she was not so sure.

“Honestly, I ask myself that every day. Like ‘why did I decide to play a guys’ sport? But it kind of just grew on me. And then after I made that first field goal, I just knew that it was my sport.”

But there are some restrictions to playing on a boys’ team. The pre-game locker room experience is a big part of being on a high school team. But the three young women cannot take part in it.

“It’s sad, but at the same time, there’s nothing we can do because we’re girls -- we can’t go in the locker-room while they’re getting ready. We just have to quickly get dressed and find out what we’re doing next.”

Teammate Jeremiah Clarke says he treats the young women like any other players on the team.

"We don't treat them any differently than we would if they were just a guy. So when I found out I was like, 'whoa, a girl can play football?' I mean you just adapt, and it's nothing really big."

Brianna Smith's father is a football coach for a local college team. He makes sure to be on the field to give his daughter pointers throughout the games. He says her bravery motivates others.

"Male and females will see a lot in her because she will be able to say to them, 'Hey, if I'm a female and I can play football, anything that you choose to do in life, of course you can do it too. All you have to do is be committed, work hard and be disciplined.'"

"Honestly when I'm older I would just like to say 'oh yeah, I did that.' I finally can say I finished my high school seasons and I completed something that a normal girl wouldn't do. And just to tell people that I have actually done something like that is just amazing."

She now dreams of playing football in college. She has the next two years to gain the attention of college football programs. But for now, it is all about TC Williams -- winning and getting a chance to help the team. I'm Avi Arditti.

You are listening to As It Is, from VOA Learning English. I'm June Simms.

College Students Help Increase Creativity in Children

Research shows that hands-on learning helps children understand complex, theoretical ideas. It also helps children perform better in school. But, as some schools cut their budgets, hands-on learning is one of the first things to go. A group of college students wants to do something about that.

Children in a Washington, DC neighborhood are happy about building things they have designed.

The boys and girls are involved in a hands-on learning program offered by SparkTruck. Students from Stanford University in California came up with the idea. Last year, they launched what they call an “educational build-mobile” and took it on the road. They offered classes to almost 3,000 children during a two-month long cross country trip.

SparkTruck is now in its second year. And students from three other California colleges have joined the program. One of them is Benji Kuroda, a student at the Art Center College of Design.

“We are trying to bring creativity and design workshops to kids all over, and bring them prototyping tools and material, and show them that all these things are accessible to them even if they don’t have them at school.”

The children begin by examining different ideas. They then build a model of whatever they have dreamed up. Owen Whitman is taking the class.

“I made a flying Cyclops – just one eye. I had a lot of fun making new stuff and learning how to mind, and electricity works.

“We are not perfect as we are not all designers, we are not all engineers. But we try to bring in what we feel is important as part of a curriculum which is thinking creatively and not being afraid to make mistakes”.

Children get to control LEGO robots. They can experiment with high-technology tools, including a laser cutter and a 3D printer, and more traditional workshop tools, like a hammer. Fadilat Adefola Raji is also taking part in the class.

“It is very nice and I never knew about like how things vibrate. And it was very cool being here and this is also a cool machine.”

Pieces of paper along the top of the truck document every design made by the students. Phyllis Klein is the owner of “Fab Lab, DC.” She led the class in Washington.

“I think what it does is it sparks their imagination. It gives them a window into things that they can do. It shows them what is possible.”

While the SparkTruck team shares their love of hands-on learning, they are also getting something out of it. So says Brittany Hallawell from Stanford University.

“I have learned about how to work with children. I have seen a lot of kids that were about to give up and then ended up making something, which is just really inspiring for me.”

SparkTruck has received some donations from businesses and money from Kickstarter, a website that raises money for creative projects. The student volunteers admit that being on the road for two months can be difficult. But they hope to share the road with even more SparkTrucks in the future.

And that is As It Is. Thanks for listening.

Have a question or comment about our show? We would love to hear from you. Email us at learningenglish@voanews.com.

I'm June Simms in Washington. Stay with VOA for world news at the top of the hour, Universal Time.