



### The school

Jubilee is a large primary school in Hackney experienced in working with creative organisations. Many cultures and nationalities are represented among both staff and pupils, and a very high percentage of children speak English as an additional language. Over 35% of children are on the register of special educational needs, and pupil mobility is high. It has been described by Ofsted (2003) as 'a very good school striving for excellence' and has received many awards.

### The context

Jubilee Primary School is on a fascinating journey. We have long valued creativity in education and believe that though it is vital to teach the basics, creativity gives meaning, depth and context not only to the curriculum but also to life itself. We are committed to building pupils' self-esteem and motivation through creativity. We have also become interested in how we teach not just what we teach, and have brought in a more child-centred approach using preferred learning styles and multiple intelligences.

# A child-centred approach at key stage 1

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## The project

As a school we had decided to create an outdoor space for play, so when we joined the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme we decided to develop the project to incorporate preferred learning styles theory. We planned to include literacy (speaking and listening) and design, adapting the way in which we teach to help the children to make sense of their learning.

We were partnered with Vicky Cave, who was creative director during the development phase of Discover, an interactive learning centre which opened in 2003 in Stratford, east London, and is now a freelance consultant. Vicky started the process with the school's infant classes, telling them a story about a child who was alone in the playground and crying because she had no one and nothing to play with. The children were encouraged to think of the ending of the story – 'what happened to the little girl, how did she find her way out of her sadness?' The children developed ideas and stories about the strange machine in which she travelled, the places she went to and who and what she found there. These stories were made into little picture books by the children and shared orally with their classes. The children then made three-dimensional models of the creatures that the little girl met on her search for someone or something to play with.

Sections of the individual stories were chosen by the class and incorporated into one story. All the four infant class stories were then combined into one big story, using the elements that the children liked the best. Next, the children made plaster models of the monsters or other exciting aspects that appeared in the one infant story.

The classes were told that their story would form the basis of a new playground to be built at school; which parts of the story could best be brought to life? The children worked on huge pieces of paper on the floor, drawing group pictures of those parts of the story that would be good additions to the playground. They also used chalk in the playground to envisage what the story would look like if it came to life.

## Preferred learning styles testing

At this stage, I became interested in finding out the percentages of different learning styles in the infant classes. The children were being exposed to a range of learning opportunities but were we hitting the right balance? In order to answer this we needed to develop insights into the children's different learning preferences, but how do you test children who cannot read when most of the tests involve an element of reading? We felt that we should devise a test that didn't involve any reading, could be undertaken in small groups led by a classroom assistant or teacher, or as a whole class, and that would give some indication of which learning style or styles individuals preferred.

Children were asked to complete the following tasks:

- **Listening to instructions (auditory)**  
Asked to put bricks together to make a house – they were given instructions one at a time.
- **Making (kinaesthetic)**  
Asked to make a house – given no instructions or clues.
- **Looking (visual)**  
Asked to copy the brick animal that the teacher has made, using similar bricks.

The children were tested in small groups and were graded on how successfully they carried out the tests, for example, was the shape recognisable as a house or an animal?

I am under no illusions about the scientific basis for this test. It did not constitute an extensive preferred learning styles assessment; however, it needed to be entertaining and not too difficult to carry out. It was always intended as a means of validating other observations.

## 31 The results of the learning styles assessments

	V	A	K	VA	VK	AK	VAK	NONE
<b>Yellow Class year 1 27 pupils</b>	10	1	5	1	3	2	0	5
<b>Gold Class year 1 30 pupils</b>	6	2	1	4	3	2	5	7
<b>Grey Class year 2 27 pupils</b>	1	3	8	2	2	3	1	7

There are few consistent patterns here, other than a similarly high number of children displaying no preferred learning style at all. The children were very young and have predominantly experienced visual and kinaesthetic learning; listening to instructions is difficult for many of them. Is it too early to be testing for any kind of learning style? Perhaps it is sufficient that, as teachers, we have an increased awareness of how children learn and have the confidence to discuss different ways of approaching teaching and learning and the kinds of learning we wish to encourage.

### Making the playground

Having chosen which parts of the story could feasibly be made into a playground the children had to decide what questions they would ask a fabricator. The children wanted to know how the fabricator would turn their ideas into something they could play on, how they would make it safe and the kinds of materials they would use.

Two children from each class were chosen to interview three different fabricators to see which one would best be able to realise their designs. This was hugely successful; the children really rose to the challenge and chose Steve Patching from Hands On Inventions. The children's reasons were interesting; Steve did not have as much experience as the others but they felt that he would be able to carry out their wishes better than the other people who seemed to be more interested in their own designs. One of the children said, 'Steve will give us something that we want, as he will listen to us more and use materials in more interesting ways.' These children then went to the workshops to see the playground being made and added their own particular mark to the finished design.

This project was a total merging of VAK: visual model making, auditory stories continually being retold and constantly being redeveloped, kinaesthetically making and playing.

### Impact

Attributing impact is very difficult. There has been an improvement in the children's writing but the progress made within years 1 and 2 is outstanding and remarkable anyway; is it really a consequence of working in this way? A more noticeable change is in the confidence of the children; those in the infants are often quite shy and don't appreciate strangers or those with whom they don't feel comfortable. This seems to have changed. Socially more confident, the children seem to be more outgoing and are very willing to chat about what they have been doing. They have a real ownership of their work and their status within the school community has been raised. The juniors are quite envious of what the infants have done and the assembly in which the infants told the school about the project was hugely enjoyed and admired by everybody.

We have certainly enhanced our learning environment and it has given our teachers (two of whom were newly qualified) the chance to experiment with different approaches to teaching and learning. I personally feel that integrating preferred learning styles should be a principle of early years teaching; the children in the infants experience a wider variety of teaching and learning styles, which has in the past been curtailed as the child progresses through the school. This project has made us examine our practice and hopefully this increased awareness of learning will spread throughout the school. By making our teaching styles more explicit in our planning we will be able to more fully reach the individual, increasing the enjoyment and satisfaction of both child and teacher.