Learning about Learning
Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity

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Assessment tool

This assessment tool was developed as part of the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme. Detailed guidance on how to use these sheets can be found on pages 57-60.

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Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme

Introduction

Hannah Wilmot, editor

Learning about Learning arises from a two-year action research programme supported by Creative Partnerships London East involving ten schools and a range of creative partners. The programme ran from September 2003 to July 2005. The resource contains background on the programme and underlying theories; experiences and reflections of the practitioners involved; and a number of tools developed during the programme.

Background

Creative Partnerships London East was one of the first 16 Creative Partnerships areas set up across England. When they were launched in 2002, each Creative Partnerships area was asked to identify a research focus. The London Borough of Newham was involved at that time in the A+ Project – a scheme inspired by work pioneered in North Carolina, America that focuses on preferred learning styles. The A+ Project in Newham paired artists and teachers to develop alternative teaching strategies to cater for the different learning preferences of pupils. The concept of preferred learning styles struck a chord with the members of the newly formed Advisory Group for Creative Partnerships London East and it was duly adopted as the research focus for the area. The programme, entitled Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity, was launched at a one-day event for teachers and representatives from the creative and cultural sector at Stratford Circus in November 2002.

Action research

The decision to base the programme on an action research methodology stemmed from a concern to help schools and creative practitioners learn from their work on learning styles and creativity and use this as a basis for further development. The programme was grounded in an understanding of action research as a process that:

- leads to cycles of questioning, answer seeking and reflection

- encourages open-mindedness and a willingness to consider different views

- helps develop knowledge that can advance creative teaching practice

- encourages a commitment to innovation

- encourages responsibility for professional development

The stages in the action research process within the programme were:

- establishing baselines

- planning activities and strategies

- piloting materials and approaches

- gathering evidence

- evaluating impact

- resolving specific problems and issues

- dissemination

- developing practice

The Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme

Aims:

- To engage creative partners in a development process that will strengthen the knowledge for good practice

- For findings to be picked up at a whole-school level and integrated into development

- For the schools involved to contribute to the body of knowledge about creative approaches to teaching and learning

- For the schools involved to communicate their experiences to support their engagement with the issues that the programme has addressed

The process

The Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research project was led by two consultants, Derek Brown and Paul Howard. The programme spanned two academic years. In the first year, Creative Partnerships London East agreed to support one school in each of the four boroughs in the area. Schools were invited to bid for inclusion in the programme and the institutions selected included a primary school in Newham, a secondary special school in Hackney, a mixed comprehensive in Islington and a boys' secondary school in Tower Hamlets. In the second year, six additional schools successfully applied to join the programme.

All schools were involved in a common core of activity as well as sustaining their own focus. The programme was led in school by the Creative Partnerships coordinator. The common core included:

- **Assessment of learners' preferred learning styles and self esteem** – most schools started by testing the cohort of pupils directly involved in the programme. Some schools extended the testing to other classes/year groups. The results of the assessments were shared with pupils in many but not all schools.

- **Use of the action research framework** – the consultants introduced framework to the Creative Partnerships coordinators in an early training session.

- **Involvement of creative partners** – some schools integrated the action research into Creative Partnerships projects already planned; some designed projects to specifically explore learning styles; other schools had an existing agenda that the action research could support.

- **Involvement in a project group** – a group was formed that included the Creative Partnerships coordinators from all schools involved in the action research programme and members of the London East team. The group, convened by the consultants, met every half-term and shared experiences, challenges, good practice and documentation relating to the programme.

- **Consideration of established research sources** – the consultants presented input on relevant theory at training sessions and provided additional sources to support individuals' specific needs and interests.

- **Engagement with development workshops and training** – the consultants aimed to ensure that all participating coordinators understood the background to preferred learning styles and creativity, the action research process and partnership practice. Training on preferred learning styles for creative partners was somewhat ad hoc in the first year but experience showed that this shared understanding between all partners was highly beneficial. In the second year, therefore, such training was provided more systematically.

The four schools involved in the first year of the research benefited from a higher level of input from the consultants and a research trip to America which also helped to bond the group. Although the six schools that joined for the second year of the programme had less input from the consultants, the four original schools became part of the support mechanism for the six new schools. The introduction of new schools also served to re-energise the programme group and provide more scope for professional dialogue within educational phases.

The programme successfully brought together individuals from schools, the creative sector and Creative Partnerships London East and the consultants to learn, work, create and reflect in a productive and creative learning community.

The role of the consultants

The roles taken by the consultants varied between schools depending on the particular needs of the school and the respective Creative Partnerships coordinator. Typical roles included:

- staff development
- mentoring the Creative Partnerships coordinator
- classroom work alongside the teacher
- supporting teachers with lesson preparation
- development of assessment tools
- preparing staff and pupils for assessments
- analysis of data from assessments
- supporting the evaluation process
- organising the project group meetings

Principal gains

This is not an evaluation document. The articles in this book are mostly reflective narrative although some contain elements of evaluation. The individual and institutional impact has been wide-ranging and sometimes unexpected. It is impossible to list all the gains here but the most common are:

- raising teachers' awareness of the teaching/learning dynamic
- developing teachers' practice which has had a direct impact on pupils' access to learning
- developing a shared language to discuss the learning needs and outcomes for pupils
- developing and embedding systems and policies that embrace the preferred learning styles approach
- enhancing collaborative practice in schools

Factors for success

Collaboration was central to the success of this programme. The collaboration and support between individuals from different schools was initiated through the project group and has led to lasting professional relationships. The headteacher of Stormont House School, for example, describes how membership of the project group provided the necessary support, time and reflection to develop a vision for his school. Collaboration between creative practitioners was also critical; different individuals bringing complementary learning and teaching styles to provide diverse

routes to learning for pupils. The pairing of creative practitioners with varied skills is described by the deputy headteacher in Digging up a Story at Lauriston Primary school.

Collaboration between teaching staff and creative practitioners is a maxim of Creative Partnerships practice and was inevitably also a critical factor in the success of the work with PLS. Creative practitioners were able to model new teaching strategies that provided equal access to learning and many teachers felt empowered to adopt these strategies and change their classroom practice as a result. A teacher at Central Foundation Girls' School, for example, describes how her approach to teaching English has changed since the project with Bow Arts Trust.

The programme had a strong formative element (encouraged by the consultants) with the project group often used as a sounding board for challenges and learning. Participants were encouraged to ask questions, to seek improvements and institute change. The combined reflections of the coordinators from Stormont House School and Islington Arts and Media School exemplify this change programme. Assessment tools were introduced at the start of the action research programme but again, improvements were sought and a new tool designed (see Tools section).

A strength of this programme was that it focused on children and young people learning about learning. The Creative Partnerships coordinator at Gallions Primary School, for example, describes how sharing the language of preferred learning styles with her pupils deepened their understanding about their own learning and helped to bond the class. At Bow School, an understanding of preferred learning styles has been used to support students' choices around subject selection for key stage 4 and work experience.

The programme successfully brought together individuals from schools, the creative sector and Creative Partnerships London East and the consultants to learn, work, create and reflect in a productive and creative learning community.

Theory informing the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme

Many current difficulties in UK schools can be traced back to a view of intelligence that stems from 1904, in Paris, when Alfred Binet and his colleague William Stern designed their IQ (intellectual quotient) test. The existence of IQ tests, as a way of measuring children's intelligence, has led to an unhelpful distinction between academic and creative subjects. It has also encouraged a ranking of subjects and skills, suggesting some should be regarded as higher status than others.

Introduction

In A Mind at a Time (Simon & Schuster, April 2002), Mel Levine MD writes:

'Some children end up paying an exorbitant price for having the kind of mind they were born with. Through no fault of their own, they are the owners of brains that somehow don't quite mesh with the demands they come up against, requirements like the need to spell accurately, write legibly, read quickly, work efficiently, or recall multiplication facts automatically.

When they grow up, they will be able to practice their brain's specialities; in childhood they will be evaluated ruthlessly on how well they do everything. Having seen so often the agony of those who taste failure at an early age, I have developed a fervent commitment to such kids and to their parents and teachers. All are well-meaning, innocent victims of a child's particular neurological circuitry.'

The Creative Partnerships London East Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme owes much to the hard work and dedication of others in the field, like Mel Levine, whose research and hypotheses have shaped and influenced our thoughts. Commitment to the research programme came from many varied starting points. For some it grew from a concern about why children might be rejected from mainstream education, when they were clearly talented. For others it was about children being categorised as 'special needs' when perhaps 'differing needs' would be more accurate; others questioned why children who 'excelled' in the arts might 'fail' in other subjects. These basic questions all identify the same kinds of issues encountered by Mel Levine in his work with schools.

In developing the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme, inspiration was drawn from many sources, particularly from America where research challenged us to reassess what we know about how people learn most effectively. Research in Maryland, for example, has explored the relationship between the arts and educational success and has given a strong focus to both the differing forms of intelligence we draw on[1] and the way we access information when learning (referred to as our 'preferred learning style'). By understanding pupils' preferred learning styles, researchers have found that schools are better able to organise classrooms, management strategies and forms of lesson delivery to enable all pupils to achieve. Evidence from educational institutions in America that have employed this approach show it can help raise achievement in schools by enabling students to understand key concepts through their preferred learning style. They also found it frequently had a huge impact on the self-esteem of pupils, especially those who had struggled with learning in the past.

The work of Howard Gardener, through his base at Project Zero[2], has also been highly influential in the debate about creativity and learning. For two decades, Howard Gardner has challenged traditional constructs of intelligence and replaced it with the concept of 'multiple intelligences'. Whether there are eight intelligences, as Gardner currently suggests, or more, as some others have argued, the point is that there is more than one kind of intelligence. We believe understanding multiple intelligence theory and preferred learning styles is fundamental to the principle of embracing creativity because preferred learning styles and creativity fit together like two halves of a puzzle.

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1 Howard Gardener's work on Multiple Intelligences has informed much of this research. In 'Frames of Mind' (1983), Gardner identified seven intelligences: Linguistic, Musical, Logical-Mathematical, Spatial, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Interpersonal and Intrapersonal. He has since added an eighth intelligence – Naturalist.

2 Project Zero is based at Harvard Graduate School of Education.

7   The relationship between preferred learning styles and creativity

By considering learning and creativity together we can see a picture of what happens when creativity is embraced as part of education, allowing many learning styles to have equal validity. Both halves can be appreciated singly but when combined we understand the qualities of their relationship as well as those that are unique to each.

The definition of creativity from All Our Futures, the report by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, tells us;

'Creativity involves doing something. People are not creative in the abstract; they are creative in something – in mathematics, in engineering, in writing, in music, in business, in whatever. You cannot be creative unless you are actually doing something. In this respect creativity is different from imagination.'

It goes on to suggest;

'…defining a process that covers such a wide range of activities and personal styles is inherently difficult… four key features of the creative process are: using imagination; pursuing purposes; judging value and being original.'

For this research programme we took a definition that preferred learning styles describe the route that people prefer to receive information to maximise their understanding. We also looked at the work of John Stein, professor of physiology at Oxford University, who has shown through neurological scanning that some routes into the brain are more or less effective for all of us. Regardless of individual neurological circuitry, however, we all fall into three broad groupings of people who prefer receiving information through visual, kinaesthetic or auditory routes.

- **Visual:** Learning through seeing; we like to see pictures or diagrams; we like demonstrations or watching film.

- **Auditory:** Learning through hearing; we like to listen to audio-recordings, lectures, debates, discussions and verbal instructions.

- **Kinaesthetic:** Learning through physical activities and through direct involvement; we like to be hands-on, moving, touching and experiencing.

It is also clear that these preferences can change and be encouraged or developed according to the stimulus and the safety of our environment.

Research by Michael Grinder, author of Righting the Educational Conveyor Belt (Red Seal Educational Series, 1989), suggests that in a typical group of 30 students there are likely to be 22 that have enough visual, auditory and kinaesthetic tendencies to be able to learn no matter how the lesson is presented. Two or three students will have difficulty learning regardless of the presentation style owing to factors outside of the classroom. The others, some 20% of the group, will favour one modality so strongly that they will have extreme difficulty learning anything unless the subject is presented in their preferred style. Grinder refers to them as VO (visual only), AO (auditory only) and KO (kinaesthetic only). The VO and AO learners will probably cope as most standard lessons will accommodate their needs. He points out however;

'It's not just a coincidence that the initials KO stand for knockout. These kids are 'knocked out' of the educational system. In every study I have seen regarding 'kids at risk,' kinaesthetic children make up the vast majority of the 26% dropout rate.'

Key elements of preferred learning styles and creativity

Preferred Learning Styles		Creativity
Visualising	of ideas	by imagining and originality
Auditory	discussion and description	using language to analyse, judge value and share
Kinaesthetically	engaging	by doing and pursuing purposes

When you observe children working creatively you see them find an entry point into their work through their learning style, which enables them to understand key concepts crucial to their learning. It allows Grinder's 'KOs', to also 'enter the learning zone'.

Clearly creativity is not unique to the arts, but exploring the relationship between preferred learning styles and creativity through projects involving creative partners enables great insight into the relationship. As in most arts lessons the approach taken by creative partners requires children to work as artists and actively engage in the creative process. The children are taught the skills of the subject as well as the body of knowledge associated with it in the curriculum.

Schools and creative partners found these four key conditions for creative learning, identified by Bill Lucas, to be particularly relevant in the school context:

1 The need to be challenged both by having goals set for us and by being helped to set our own. We need this to be done in a supportive but demanding atmosphere where, if we fail, we learn from that failure. This includes being encouraged to move outside the comfort zone of our preferred learning styles to access learning in new ways.

2 The elimination of negative stress. If the brain is over-stressed, it ceases to operate at higher levels. Our most primitive survival instincts take over and dominate. Sometimes it is clear that stress has become so endemic in a school that neither pupils or teachers can give expression to their full selves. Providing diverse entry routes to learning reduces stress.

3 Feedback. Without skilled feedback, we will not learn to distinguish what was quite good from what was stunningly brilliant. We will not learn which approach works better and, most importantly, we will not acquire the habit of internal reflection. With effective high-quality feedback (including information on our preferred learning styles) we acquire self-knowledge, deepen our self-esteem and continue to be motivated to learn.

4 The capacity to live with uncertainty. Teachers who are seeking to encourage creativity cannot expect to have all the answers. However, they can offer robust and workable alternative structures and processes to their pupils, which can be developed and personalised. Pupils who access learning through different routes can still work towards a common goal. Creative teachers are hungry to learn themselves and keen to pass on their 'appetite' for their chosen interest.

Doors into the learning zone

The accommodation of the range of learning styles within a class does not have to entail the teacher or facilitator rushing around in a manic, plate spinning exercise. The critical point is not that all students need to have their preferred learning styles fed constantly, rather that these preferences are points of access to learning in general.

Remembering that we all have a capacity in each of the areas, it may help to think of our preferred styles as the doors into the learning zone. Providing there are key points at which our styles come into play, we are in a position to unlock the door and enter the learning zone. Once inside, regardless of our entry point, we are in a position to access other forms of learning, even if these are relatively weak preferences.

Of course, the down side is that, if the door remains locked or the entrance is very narrow (where there are very few opportunities to engage a particular style), there is a risk that some learners will not be enabled, stimulated or motivated to access the learning on offer. In schools, this seems to happen most commonly with learners who have a marked kinaesthetic preference, especially in subject areas which contain little or no practical activity or movement. Anecdotal evidence from teachers suggests that there may be a high correlation between students being regarded as troublesome, disaffected or having emotional or behavioural difficulties and their having a kinaesthetic preference. If this is the case, the implications for the way we provide access to learning and for the way in which we assess difficulties could be profound.

Of course, perceived behaviour problems, that may have their roots in the failure to recognise learning styles, are not confined to kinaesthetic preferences. The following table presents examples of how students' ways of learning may be misconstrued as symptoms of problem behaviours.

Learning preference	Behaviour	Explanation	Misinterpretation
Visual	Doodling on exercise books.	A visual activity can help sustain concentration.	No respect for property. Cannot be concentrating. Off-task behaviour.
Visual	Not getting underway with task set by teacher.	Without visual reinforcement of oral instruction, the teacher's words may not be heard.	Inattentive behaviour. Laziness. Work avoidance.
Auditory	Not looking at teacher when (s)he is giving instructions.	Able to take in instruction without looking at teacher. Indeed, visual focus on teacher may interfere with auditory concentration.	Day dreaming. Rude, inattentive.
Auditory	Talking to neighbour during teacher-led plenary.	Needs to check that (s)he has understood by talking through.	Disruptive, distracting behaviour. Rude, inattentive.
Kinaesthetic	Pushes back chair while working.	Needs space in which to think and work.	Not engaging in work. Off-task. Disaffected.
Kinaesthetic	Often out of seat, asking to borrow equipment.	Needs movement to be able to concentrate.	Disruptive behaviour. Out of control. Likely to cause conflict.

In conclusion

Change causes considerable uncertainty and insecurity that can act as a catalyst for creativity but does create a need for fixed points that offer security. Considering other research findings enabled the research schools to take risks and to be courageous. Not everything was successful, but at least it was explored before being rejected. The Department for Education and Skills publications, Excellence and Enjoyment and Creating Conditions for Learning, Unit 19: Learning Styles (2004) give further endorsement for our efforts, but the greatest encouragement comes from knowing it works.

Preferred learning styles and career pathways

Jim Morris, head of music, head of year and Creative Partnerships coordinator at Bow School, Tower Hamlets

The school

Bow School is a boys' secondary school in Tower Hamlets. The school population benefits from a fairly even mix of its three main ethnic groups (white British, Black African-Caribbean and Asian/Bengali). 63% are eligible for free school meals and 30% are identified with special educational needs. It is a relatively small establishment of around 550 students and as an inner city boys school it faces the constant challenge of student underachievement and difficulties in accessing the curriculum that are typical of this kind of school. Over the last five to six years, the school has undergone a consistent process of improvement that has brought it out of serious weaknesses and positioned it as a valuable centre for learning (Ofsted 2003).

Recent history

At the centre of this improvement has been a focus on teaching and learning and a commitment to embrace a variety of strategies to help staff overcome the inherent problems that the school's students faced in accessing their learning.

Staff had been introduced to the main concepts of the preferred learning styles approach through a learning and study skills presentation some time ago. Whilst it was dynamic, staff saw no immediate relevance of these theories to the education of their students. The ideas and principles of the presentation were therefore not adopted by the school.

This remained the case until, in September 2003, the school was selected to participate in the London East Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme. As Creative Partnerships coordinator it was logical that I manage the programme. However, as a result of this previous experience, I entered the programme with a low expectation of the potential outcomes and an impression that I had a fair understanding of the preferred learning styles concepts on which to base my project planning. Both of these assumptions were to prove to be inaccurate.

The support from Creative Partnerships for this action research programme comprised:

- regular input and support from Paul Howard, one of the two consultants leading on the action research programme

- opportunities to share good practice with representatives from other participating schools through group meetings

- a research trip to America to observe the preferred learning styles work of schools in New York State and Oklahoma

Each aspect provided a fund of knowledge that could be customised, re-interpreted and applied to the projects that the school then undertook as part of the action research programme.

Objectives

Objectives developed as the programme progressed and included:

- to explore the value of preferred learning style awareness

- to provide opportunities to develop elements of good practice that can be shared

- to provide evidence of the value of preferred learning styles in helping students to access the curriculum

- to establish a framework in which the arts help to deliver a preferred learning styles approach to teaching

- to consider the impact that the preferred learning styles approach might have on other aspects of school life

Year one, September 2003 – July 2004

We initially decided to work with one group (year 9) and to confine our effort to the music department. Some of the reasons for this were operational (as project coordinator I was also the head of music and year 9) but in addition it was felt that, with the pressures of the forthcoming Standard Attainment Tests and the ongoing options process (to select subjects for GCSE), these students would get valuable support from an awareness of their preferred learning styles at this stage in their education.

On the basis of this decision we planned a Slavery and Oppression project with our chosen creative partner Guildhall School of Music and Drama and assessed all year 9 students to establish their preferred learning styles.

After starting the project however, it became clear that the benefits could be maximised if we expanded the scope of the project to include work in the pastoral and senior management teams within the school.

By the end of this first phase we had undertaken the following work:

Curriculum
Working with professional musicians, students received training in the use of Cubasis (music software) and learnt the basic principles of blues music. Drawing on these new skills, students created music related to the themes of slavery and oppression which they were studying in humanities. Outcomes included a CD of students' music and a final performance.

Pastoral

All year 9 students were assessed for their preferred learning style and informed of the results. An assembly and form periods were designed to encourage students to reflect on this information.

An interview programme was devised to support the students in making appropriate option choices for key stage 4; allowing them to consider their preferred learning style as part of the process.

The interview was piloted with a small number of students. I then trained the pastoral team who conducted interviews with all year 9 students. Following the interviews, feedback was provided to parents in the form of curriculum recommendations.

Managerial

A selected group of senior and middle managers received training on preferred learning styles as part of a curriculum planning residential delivered by Paul Howard.

Issues from the training were considered and informed planning for the following academic year influencing the ongoing development of the programme within the school.

Outcomes

There were many valuable outcomes of this initial pilot. The following three were most influential to the further development of the preferred learning styles research:

1 The programme introduced year 9 students to the idea of preferred learning styles. They were able to understand its value to them and reflect upon the choices that this knowledge had given them. The knowledge was useful in helping students to select the appropriate subjects to study at key stage 4 – if nothing else the information encouraged a level of focused debate that deepened each student's understanding of their own qualities, abilities and aspirations.

2 Feedback from the pastoral team suggested that the programme had helped many students gain confidence about themselves as learners and that this confidence had begun to have a positive effect on their behaviour in class. Students were able to perceive their differences as part of their own individual learning style and not as something negative.

3 As project coordinator, my understanding of preferred learning styles had greatly increased enabling me to see the potential benefits for the whole school.

Year two, September 2004 – July 2005

The headteacher and senior leadership group agreed to extend the scope of the programme for the second year and to include training on preferred learning styles for the whole staff team. New objectives were formulated:

• to assess the learning styles of the whole of key stage 3 and use this information to begin to improve the quality of lesson delivery throughout the school

• to continue to use the preferred learning styles approach within the school's options process to support the subject selection process

• to explore the potential for building upon the initial choices made as part of the options process to help students develop a coordinated career plan throughout key stage 4

• to continue to provide opportunities for a variety of subject areas to conceive, plan and deliver a range of cross-curricular projects with a preferred learning styles approach

We continued to work with our creative partners to develop cross-curricular projects informed by preferred learning styles. It had become clear, however, that the preferred learning styles approach was having the greatest impact on the systems to support students in their transition from key stage 3 to key stage 4. In the second year of the action research programme, it was agreed to explore the extent to which this system could be utilised with students in key stage 4 to support their choice of work experience and their eventual move towards post-16 education.

The expansion of the programme meant that all staff needed to be aware of the preferred learning styles approach, its potential benefits and outcomes, and the part that they would need to play in ensuring its successful application within the school. As a result, we embarked upon a programme of staff training and corporate awareness to raise the profile of preferred learning styles throughout the school.

By the end of this second phase we had undertaken the following work:

Curriculum
During the autumn term we completed a successful filmmaking and installation project based on the Reformation entitled Why Was Richard Whiting Killed? It involved collaboration between the history and music departments supported by a team of professional filmmakers, musicians and composers.

During the spring term we embarked upon a cross-curricular science and music project with year 9 students called Is This Photosynthesis? The project followed a similar format to the previous years' Slavery and Oppression project with a CD and performance as outcomes again.

Pastoral
At the start of the new academic year all students in key stage 3 were assessed for their preferred learning style.

The same system of interviews for year 9 was adopted to support students' option choices whilst considering their learning style.

These interviews were carried out by the new year 9 pastoral team who were given appropriate training.

All year 10 students were invited to review their previous year's option choice interview and to consider how this might inform their choice of work experience placement. This process was supported by form tutors.

Managerial
A whole staff Inset day introduced the main principles of preferred learning styles and the school's plans to develop the project. During the Inset, staff took part in the same assessment process that had been delivered to the students.

Following this Inset, staff were encouraged to work with Paul Howard on a lesson plan that could be delivered with a specific preferred learning styles approach. These lessons were observed and written feed back was given to staff to contribute to their ongoing professional development.

Outcomes

Again there were many satisfying outcomes from the work that had been completed during the second year of the programme. However the following three are the most significant:

1 The profile of preferred learning styles improved as a result of the various student and teacher assessments that took place. Six members of staff (approx 20% of the whole staff) were given the opportunity to work with Paul Howard. These six, together with myself, formed a core project group on preferred learning styles. This group is now in a strong position to support ongoing development within the school.

2 The option choice work was successfully completed with all year 9 students. This success proved that a new team of staff could be trained to effectively deliver this part of the programme without my supervision.

3 The extension of the programme into year 10 (work experience) was equally successful. Students enjoyed reviewing their previous interview responses and recognised the value of reflecting upon the choices that they made. The success of the process was reflected in the improved attendance rates at placements and the overall satisfaction recorded by most students in their responses to the work experience debrief.

Incorporating preferred learning styles into lesson plans

Paul Howard, preferred learning styles consultant

Background

At Bow School, Tower Hamlets, the development of classroom practice in response to students' preferred learning styles was grounded in a broader process of awareness raising, assessment and continuing professional development.

Although preferred learning styles focused lesson planning can be undertaken by an individual teacher, it is likely to be most productive when part of a whole-school approach. At Bow School, this included not only a programme of continuing professional development but also the systemic use of preferred learning styles assessment data to inform year 9 option choices and year 10 work experience decisions. Following the whole staff Inset, six teachers volunteered to pilot systematic use of learning styles theory within their planning for a single lesson. Outlines of, and observations on, three of these lessons are included here.

One of the principal features of the group of lessons was the diversity of approach adopted by the teachers to the inclusion of learning styles theory. This provides an important point of guidance namely that, the accommodation of diverse learning styles is enhanced when staff are encouraged to develop their own approaches. Giving teachers a set way of incorporating learning styles theory into their lessons undermines the importance of diversity.

Some teachers elected to organise their lessons around groups of students with particular learning preferences, others adopted a more integrated structure. Some strengthened a particular dimension of their teaching (visual, auditory or kinaesthetic), others sought to include all three more systematically. Some chose to focus on enhancing the instructional parts of the lesson, others created more space for students to initiate their own learning and participate in delivery.

None of these options is superior to the others. As demonstrated in the outcomes from the lessons, all have the potential to strengthen, even transform, teaching and learning.

Bow School pilot lesson

Date: 1 December 2004　　**Subject:** Science
Teacher: DL　　**Year Group:** 7

The three learning styles are identified as follows: visual (V), auditory (A) and kinaesthetic (K)

Outline

The theme of the lesson was sources of energy, with particular reference to the energy we need and use. Structured around a strong visual spine (PowerPoint presentation) the lesson was structured to include auditory elements (explanation, paired activity, reading) and kinaesthetic components (distributing materials, handling materials, physical movement and, for some students, exercising).

Observations

The noise and excitement levels were high at times, not as an impediment to the lesson but as a reflection of the students' engagement. Two or three students appeared not to be listening (little visual attention to the teacher at times of explanation) but when checked, these were among those assessed with a pronounced auditory learning preference and they had assimilated the instructions.

The hands-on kinaesthetic activities worked well, not just for those with a clear K preference. DL expected those with a K preference to be the first to volunteer for one of the demonstration activities; however, it was three with an A preference who volunteered, probably indicating that they were listening more attentively. Although those with a K preference were not actively involved, the use of a kinaesthetic (demonstration) task appeared to hold the attention of the whole class. This, combined with the previous use of a kinaesthetic activity involving the whole class, seems to have ensured that the K 'doorway' into learning was sufficiently open for the duration of the lesson.

Conclusions

The lesson was effectively constructed in terms of access through V, A and K 'doorways' into learning and provided insights into issues of VAK balance in a lesson. Clearly there is no need to slavishly apportion equal time to the different styles of learning. As shown here, differentiation does not have to be maintained throughout; the key is to ensure sufficient and well-timed entry points. Provided the student with a strong preference can gain access to learning from that position of strength, he can access the other forms of learning too.

Bow School pilot lesson

Date: 2 December 2004   **Subject:** Maths
Teacher: BK   **Year Group:** 7

The three learning styles are identified as follows: visual (V), auditory (A) and kinaesthetic (K).

Outline

A difficult group that has struggled with algebra and contains a number of students whose behaviour can be problematic in class. The central focus of the lesson was the solution of equations of the 'x+4=2x-2' type. BK planned and prepared a number of visual aids that lent themselves to physical manipulation by students (kinaesthetic demonstration). Overall, the aim was to strike a good balance between V, A and K entry points into the lesson and to increase the motivational aspects of the lesson.

Observations

During the warm up activity (a few basic equations on the overhead projector) there was a degree of disquiet, e.g. 'this is primary school work'; however, when BK introduced her bespoke visual aids (two types of objects with adhesive backing strips) the level of engagement shot up. Some of those, whom she saw as the more problematic or reluctant students, were willing to attempt the kinaesthetic demonstrations and throughout these most of the class remained attentive. One of the demonstrators, while watching another volunteer lead the exercise, asked 'Why can't we do more work like this?'

During the phase of the lesson when students were set a number of equations to solve, engagement was more variable, although there were a few significant breakthroughs in terms of students starting out from an 'I can't do these' position growing in confidence to tackle equations unaided. When asked, they cited the strong visual and kinaesthetic participation as having helped clarify their understanding.

The final kinaesthetic plenary (in which students held cards depicting the constituent parts of the equation: x, +1 or –1) was conducted hastily owing to the lack of time, but served as a further reinforcement of the use of inverse operations to solve equations.

Conclusions

While the amount of preparation that BK undertook might not be sustainable over a large number of lessons, on this occasion, the use of visual and kinaesthetic demonstrations has significant merit. Without doubting that the quality and novelty of the materials was significant, the process of involving students in the delivery of key parts of the lesson was at least as important.

There might be benefits in extending the time spent on practical phases in some lessons. If this is a medium through which students can consolidate their understanding, it seems a good trade against some of the pen and paper work.

Bow School pilot lesson

Date: 2 December 2004   **Subject:** History
Teacher: JH   **Year Group:** 8

The three learning styles are identified as follows: visual (V), auditory (A) and kinaesthetic (K).

Outline

At the end of a unit of work, this lesson posed a single, 'simple' question, 'How did Queen Elizabeth I wish to be seen?' The class was organised in groups, according to their preferred learning styles assessments and JH's moderation of these on the basis of her own observations. Two groups worked predominantly visually, researching and producing pictorial representations of how Elizabeth I was portrayed (V); two others wrote speeches for her (A); the final two groups produced short dramas to illustrate her attitude (K).

Observations

Generally, the allocation of students mainly according to their learning style groups worked well. The groups with the strongly visual task experienced the greatest difficulties, partly because their activity tended to encourage individual rather than collaborative work, partly because one student (strong AK preference) was misplaced.

The quality of the script writing (auditory focus) was encouraging particularly from one of the groups, in which one student emerged as a leader. Of the two script writing groups this had seemed the more disparate in the early stages, with individuals apparently going off at tangents. However, once the task of joining everything together got under way, they worked collaboratively and effectively.

The performance groups (kinaesthetic focus) both produced impressive pieces following a short period of discussion, planning and rehearsal. Particularly encouraging was the way in which they were able to repay the trust shown in them to rehearse outside the classroom, out of JH's sight, without disturbing other classes in the area.

Conclusions

All the groups were productive and some of the outcomes were of a high quality in relation to the time available and the complexity of the task.

Less is more – the minimal nature of the task instruction created opportunities for the students to work independently and for staff to observe, learn from and support the process. While it would not be appropriate to undertake all group work on the basis of ascribed roles according to VAK, the benefits of doing so for particular intended outcomes was ably demonstrated here.

Beyond categorisation

Reflections on working with preferred learning styles at Bow School

Eelyn Lee, filmmaker

Introduction

Kinaesthetic learner, maths smart, picture smart, gifted & talented, naughty, good, disruptive, able… Exactly how useful is it to put ourselves and our children in to these categories for learning?

With respect to the notion of preferred learning styles, we all have our preferences in life. Following a good meal you may prefer ice cream over cheesecake, making you an 'ice cream person'. If you were, however, to limit yourself purely to ice cream after every meal, you would never gather the breadth of experience acquired through trying other desserts to challenge and develop the vocabulary of your taste buds.

As adults we know that our preferences change over the years, and that developing the ability to articulate preference usually requires a degree of experience, confidence and self-esteem. It is these experiences and qualities that we need to be developing in our learners, thus providing young people with the emotional, rational and creative language that will enable them to discover their own strengths and weaknesses, labelling and re-labelling these through different stages of their lives.

19   The self-fulfilling prophesy

Categorising a child by telling them they are, for example, a 'kinaesthetic learner' immediately pins them down to one way of approaching new things. It might be the case that the student prefers to do things actively, but not providing them with alternative ways of accessing a subject or idea denies them the realisation that maybe their preferred learning style has changed, or developed in to something more complex and sophisticated. We could also see the learning process as a series of entry points. A learner with a kinaesthetic preference may appreciate an initial entry point to a new subject through a hands-on activity which enables them to access a more visual activity, which in turn motivates them to engage with their written work with more confidence.

A couple of years ago I ran a theatre and film project in a primary school in east London with a team of artists from various artistic and cultural backgrounds. Thirty children had been selected from a range of classes in one year group. The criteria for selection was that they were either gifted and talented or children that the teachers thought would benefit from doing an art project, namely the disruptive ones who in this case happened to be predominantly black boys.

It was the achievement and the level of engagement that these 'naughty' boys demonstrated during the project that amazed teachers. This is a common observation made during arts-based projects in schools and happens for a range of reasons. In this project, for example, children worked in unfamiliar groups; they were in a workshop environment in the hall with artists whose cultural make-up reflected their own; they were all working towards a common goal and had specific roles in either music, poetry, drawing, storytelling, filmmaking or performance. They were learning in different ways with facilitators who did not know 'the good readers' from 'the good drawers' allowing 'unexpected' children to excel in new areas and demonstrate new skills and interests.

Suddenly the naughty, disruptive boys were seen to have good story telling qualities or a capacity to engage with music for a full hour or showed some pride over what they were doing. Likewise, the 'good readers' were allowed to develop confidence in performing and the 'quiet' ones had the biggest stories to tell.

Providing everyone with an equal opportunity to learn can mean getting rid of methods of categorisation that can inhibit a young person, leading them to believe and fulfil the label of 'naughty' or 'disruptive', 'quiet' or 'kinaesthetic'.

Participatory film projects

In my early days of running participatory film projects I quickly realised that the traditional planning stages of filmmaking, namely the activities of scriptwriting and storyboarding, only appeal to a minority of people and at worst can be quite boring for most! Alternative methods for generating the content of a film needed to be found.

As a film is made up of many elements (such as location, colour, light, performance, sounds, music, words, story, characters) and draws upon many different areas of expertise, it is an ideal format for bringing a group of people together with diverse skills and interests to work independently towards a common goal. A good director, like a good teacher, can draw on all of these talents, orchestrating the elements to create the end product. Presented in this way the process of filmmaking can provide an excellent vehicle for delivering an inclusive participatory project that by its very nature provides a range of entry points.

Self-selection at Bow School

In the autumn term of 2004 Eelyn Lee Productions entered into a partnership with the history department at Bow School to deliver an aspect of the year 8 curriculum through the process of making a video installation. The subject was the Reformation, to be explored through the question 'Why was Richard Whiting Killed?'

We knew that within the budget and allocated eight week timeframe we could only work with a minority of the 120-strong year group to ensure a quality creative learning experience. But what criteria should we use to make that selection? Should we choose students who were gifted and talented, visual learners, good kids, naughty kids? Of course, none of these categories were appropriate.

Taster sessions

We began by running a series of taster sessions with each of the four classes in the year group that involved students in a range of activities such as brainstorming, photography, drawing, writing, researching and a visit to Tate Modern.

Following these activities we ran a self-evaluation session where the students reflected on the activities they had enjoyed so far. We posed the question, 'If you were to continue with the project which activities would you like to be involved in?' The choices were drawing, photography, performing and writing. With the theory of preferred learning styles in mind, by including these four activities we were catering for everyone's learning styles without having to test or categorise each student on their preference. Instead they could opt freely for an activity they knew they enjoyed.

During a lunchtime meeting 32 students out of the 120 opted to continue with the project and split naturally in to the four artform groups.

Devising the content

Each group worked with a professional artist to generate ideas and elements for the video installation:

- the writing group devised thematic phrases that formed a soundscape
- the photography group found evocative film locations around school
- the performance group devised movements and tableaux that were filmed in the locations
- the drawing group explored mood, colour and atmosphere within a Tudor house (Sutton House in Hackney) that informed the look of the film

The groups came together for a two-day shoot where all the ideas were realised and committed to tape.

Discovering the core group

Once the films had been edited we needed to select a small group of students to work on building the installation at Sutton House. Again we implemented a self-selection process.

The 32 students were invited to attend a screening of the rough edits one day after school. Twelve out of the 32 turned up which gave us our working party for presenting the site-specific installation. The group was so committed that they responded to an impromptu idea from the history teacher on the opening night that the students run guided tours for the audience. Within 20 minutes they had speeches prepared and were providing adults with entry points to an artform and a subject that many felt intimidated by.

Self-selecting effective teams

This core group of 12 was a diverse group of students with a range of skills, backgrounds and personalities. Their teacher said that she would never have dreamt of putting that particular group of young people together. Each one of them had found an entry point to the creative learning process; had found a role and had fun carrying it out. Moreover, they were able to feel 'themselves', which in turn contributed to building their identity and self-esteem.

21 What did we discover?

Teaching and learning

When evaluating the project we asked the 32 students whether they would opt to be in the same artform groups in a future project? Most of them said that they would like to change groups next time so they could experience something different. It seems that by opting to work initially within the comfort zone of the art form where they felt most 'at home', it gave them the confidence to try something different the next time around.

In an evaluation of the project the history teacher said that she had gained confidence in her students, allowing her to stand back more often whilst allowing them more time and space to find their own ways through an exercise. She had discovered new personal dynamics within her class, creating new possibilities for peer teaching and learning. She had also used drawing, performing and writing as entry points to other areas of the curriculum.

Personal and professional development

Beginning the project with 120 students meant that, in partnership with the teachers at Bow School, I had to find a creative method of selecting 32 participants. We did not have a solution on commencing the project but by taking a risk we found a new way of working that was inclusive and empowering for all involved. I took a large responsibility for the risk (stepping in to the unknown), so when the risk paid off it turned out to be a good investment for my own personal learning. I learnt that through true partnership, a process will take on a life of its own that needs to be trusted and responded to within a pre-determined framework.

As a creative practitioner I have known this to be true in other situations, but this project gave me an opportunity to experience it whilst holding hands with a history teacher, a Creative Partnerships coordinator, a team of artists and 120 year 8 students. It also meant that the work remained relevant to the curriculum as well as having a personal relevance to each of us who engaged with it.

Conclusion

Preferred learning styles seems like a good starting point to learn about learning and to open a discussion about teaching styles. It is a starting point in addressing the need to create different ways into subjects, projects and processes, and as educators we need to be continually thinking of providing new and diverse entry points.

The broad range of arts practices and processes can provide creative journeys through any theme, topic or subject, providing a learning experience that is challenging, exciting, rewarding and relevant. Providing young people with opportunities to explore different things in different ways enables them to develop an awareness and understanding of their own learning, skills and preferences, and a language of emotion, reason and creation through a range of experiences. These experiences build a bank of reference points in ourselves that can be called upon when needed in a range of situations whether at school, at home, in work or in love.

If the next generation is to face the future with zest and self-confidence, we must educate them to be original as well as competent.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi,
Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention, Harper Collins

Sculpture at Daniel House

Derek Brown, preferred learning styles consultant, talks to
Alistair Lambert, sculptor, and Annie Cornbleet, headteacher
(until summer 2006) at Daniel House Pupil Referral Unit

The school

Daniel House is a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) offering education, guidance and support for approximately 46 young people, predominantly African-Caribbean boys, who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools and who live in Hackney. Students have a wide range of academic ability, though most students' attainment levels are below the national average, and many have emotional, learning and behavioural difficulties.

Daniel House aims to enable its students to reintegrate into mainstream education by providing a safe and nurturing environment where they can make a fresh start. The school has high expectations of young people and provides them with the opportunity to achieve their full potential. The school works in close partnership with parents and carers, other schools and professional agencies.

Daniel House has a longstanding commitment to creative learning as a tool for enhancing self-confidence and self-belief, and has hosted visiting theatre companies and artists and regularly takes students out to arts venues.

The project

Daniel House successfully applied to join the second year of the Creative Partnerships London East Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme in September 2004. They developed a project with Free Form (a public art organisation based in Hackney) to create what the project brief described as: 'an aesthetically pleasing and educationally informative life size sculpture of the human body'. Alistair Lambert, a sculptor, undertook the project over the autumn 2004 and spring 2005 terms. One of the central aims was to involve staff and students in a cross-curricular project that introduced new and creative ways of working.

Creative Partnerships London East organised discussions with **Alistair Lambert**, sculptor and **Annie Cornbleet**, headteacher at Daniel House about their experiences of working on the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme. The discussions were led by Derek Brown.

Derek Tell me about your project at Daniel House. I understand that when you started the project you were given a fairly tight brief.

Alistair Yes. It was 'to create an interactive figure' and Annie, the headteacher, had quite clear ideas about what that would be and it's educational uses. At the time I said 'Oh Yes! I can do all that' and was genuinely happy about it. But as the process went on, I started to realise that I needed or wanted to make a piece of sculpture, rather than an educational interactive display piece. It was something about the 'gravity' of Daniel House. It seemed to say that it required a 'real thing', rather than something pretending to be something else. So for me the real thing was a piece of sculpture because that is the only thing I can do really well.

So when you say the 'gravity' of Daniel House was that the students, or the building?

It's what the students represent and what the building represents. Staff are really committed, always giving, but it seems that society is not prepared to invest in the students, to give them any 'quality' in their lives, so I wanted to ensure they had 'the best'.

But you were a catalyst for those young people in their creative work. Did you see a development in attitude and skill with the young people as they engaged with you?

Definitely. Firstly, it was just about trying to get attention and to get them to have some interest in the work; to try to get them interested in what I'm about. So the challenge initially was just to find a way in. It was about coping with the environment and the response of the students. They seemed fixed in a pattern of behaviour with their teachers, which had become 'normal', sort of manic behaviour really. In the past, when I worked with people with mental health issues or those involved with substance misuse, I found part of the trick was not to become a teacher, not to become a health worker, not to engage with everything that those people have to deal with. I found that it was better for me to offer what I'm interested in and what I'm good at and not to get drawn into the institution's familiar modes of interaction. I've found that by not being a teacher, it works better.

I know you did a lot of planning and were highly regarded by the staff.

I did plan, but I didn't plan too far ahead. I told them I didn't know what I'd be doing in the third session, but I knew what I'd be doing in the first and second. I wanted to be able to respond to what happened in the sessions, so that the workshops could become 'live events' rather than the kids acting out something I'd already planned. It seemed particularly important at Daniel House to respond to the student's ideas of what worked and what didn't work and to see them thinking and challenging ideas.

I think the art teacher was slightly anxious about the planning and wanted to know what was coming. She had a curriculum to cover and all I could say was 'well, we are going to use plaster and clay and we'll have to see where it takes us'.

So potentially there is a conflict in terms of the way that teachers have to be accountable with their planning and the way artists work. It's about giving enough planning information to the people who need the plans so that they feel comfortable… but not to plan too much because otherwise it all gets a bit dull. I think the art teacher needed to see the planning. I think she is quite a visual sort of person.

Yes that's a good point. Were you able to observe the preferred learning styles of the students in the same way?

Yes… sort of… I don't know if I'm conscious of it when I'm doing it, but afterwards I'll think about things and then their behaviour seems to make more sense. For example, with the plaster work one student became 'the mixer of plaster'. He really enjoyed the physical engagement; he seemed to need to be doing something to really engage with the ideas.

I'm trying to make sense of why having the creative approach that you brought to learning worked for them. Hearing your observations about their different behaviour pattern around the classroom seems to me important, offering a different style of engagement.

Yes, definitely. Not having to sit behind a desk for a start and then the connection between the physical action and the thing that you are trying to do, is so different from writing on a piece of paper. There's a direct connection. I find it liberating and I think that the young people did too. Once they had overcome the noise as it were, there were times when they were just in the process, flowing… with what they were doing, not thinking and not being critical of themselves or others; not letting staff stop them, not letting other kids stop them. I think it was also incredibly important that they knew they were making pieces of work that were of some further interest; they were making things that were important as part of a process which could help them make a bigger piece of sculpture.

There was a point when I did need to come back to them and begin to try and communicate ideas to them. That became quite interesting; me having to try to share theoretical concepts and not being involved in physical making and expression. That is my own personal battle, in fact, as a sculptor.

So you could understand why for some of the students working in a theoretical way is hard?

Definitely.

Now, there was a moment when I know you observed students working in very different ways.

Yes, that's right. That was fairly early on when they were taking casts and making moulds of hands and this was the first time we had mixed the plaster as a liquid to be poured into a mould.

One student didn't want to get involved with this process, he just wanted to watch. Now this was a wet process and I know some people don't like wet stuff and so I thought that's fair enough, but he was potentially going to miss the chance to take a cast from the mould he had made, so it was quite interesting for me that he didn't want to do it.

I was also aware that a number of students didn't want to listen to the instructions and didn't want to watch the demonstration they just wanted to 'do it'. A few of them listened or 'paid attention', but most rushed ahead and just needed to physically experiment. So the bulk of people rushed ahead, but this particular student refused to get involved and some of the staff were saying, 'Well if you're not going to get involved then out you go!' And I said, 'No, its fine just let him watch'. And then just before the session ended he said he did want to do his cast. So now I was sort of hesitating because the tidying up was a big issue, but it made sense to let him do it. So I let him do it and, of course, he just did it and did it very well! He had learnt from watching the others and in the next session his was the only hand that came out of the mould with all the fingers intact, which was great. By being given space to watch, he had been able to learn far more effectively.

Derek How did you feel at the beginning of the action research programme?

Annie At the beginning of the action research programme I felt sceptical, I felt 'oh gosh not another project with labels in it'. A kind of tired, weary, 'oh please not another new thing that is actually not a new thing' and a particular concern about once again labelling young people.

Working, as I do, with labelled students you have to ask what we are doing, labelling them as this and that. I really do feel that we need to be more holistic in our approach to education

and our approach to young people. They are not simply one thing or another. We all have all of it inside us and our circumstances, our social life and our educational experience, has put us in certain places.

But I was happy to join the second phase of the programme and particularly with our population of students. I have noticed they are very artistic. Not just in one artform, but across a range of arts. When they are given the opportunity they sometimes exhibit extraordinary talent as well as seeming to gain huge enjoyment. For this reason I thought 'this is interesting; let me look further into whether there is some connection with this group of excluded young people and the ways they learn'. To understand them better and to question if the way they learn has anything to do with why they may be excluded.

In the film you made, Beneath the Hood, you showed beautifully the children's creativity, to the point that the poetry they wrote and the images they created caused people in the audience to openly cry as they watched the film.

That's right. There were many positive aspects that came from the film for those young people and for the school. But for me a particularly interesting moment was captured in the film. It is when you hear the children say; 'I like the subjects where I am doing things. I like food technology, I like art, I like music. I just don't like sitting and writing and listening.' They clearly say that it's not the subject they don't like, it's the way the subject is taught. Hearing the students' thoughts captured in the film we were all very struck by the perceptiveness of their comments and for us that exactly summed up preferred learning styles.

So do you think that fundamentally it is about placing a creative approach to teaching and learning at the heart of the curriculum, which then facilitates all types of learners?

It's almost a need to retrain the entire teaching population and to make sure that this knowledge is at teacher training level.

Do you feel then that the partnership between creative practitioners and teachers might take on an important role in this process?

Yes, as long as those practitioners are conscious of this body of knowledge and equally well trained. We also need training for parents to give them a more holistic understanding of how their child learns and a less prejudiced view of which subjects are important.

What we are really talking about is defining good teaching. You need to have all three elements of visual, kinaesthetic and auditory for a good teaching or learning experience.

So are you saying then that the language of preferred learning styles has to be part of our language as educationalists even if we don't want to label children with a particular preference.

Yes. It's far too easy to say I'm a kinaesthetic learner; I'm a visual learner etc. No, you're a full learner; you just like learning that way. But it doesn't mean you are that. People have to think about it.

So what next?

I have thought about that and it does raise many questions. Does it mean that excluded students are more artistically inclined than non-excluded students? Of course, that's ridiculous. But the fact our students engage so well with the arts and the approaches used when teaching the arts does make me recognise that other forms of engagement do not suit them as well. It is also important to recognise the tremendous amount of self-esteem they get from the artistic or creative element where they can succeed.

So do you still have your reservations about labelling students?

Yes, but work on preferred learning styles has enabled the staff to have a deep discussion about how we as individuals learn and that has helped us to reflect upon the ways in which the children learn. By embracing preferred learning styles and creativity it does not mean you need to label. It is just an effective tool to enable everyone, staff and students, to think a little more about how they learn and to be a little more sympathetic when somebody can't cope. The staff are also feeling less challenged personally by students' behaviour and are looking more to ask why they can't engage with a lesson.

Sharing the language of preferred learning styles

Nathalie Allexant, primary drama advanced skills teacher and year 1 class teacher at Gallions Primary School, Newham

The school

Gallions Primary School opened in 1999 in New Beckton, Newham. It has high pupil mobility and a diverse ethnic intake with over 30 different languages spoken by children and staff; 46% of pupils are entitled to free school meals and 32% have special educational needs. Ofsted (2006) describes it an outstanding school with determined leadership, and high standards in art, music, dance and drama.

The headteacher and staff are committed to teaching creatively and the school is aiming to deliver all of the curriculum through the arts. Projects with artists and cultural organisations, in particular those developed through Creative Partnerships, are designed to contribute to this objective.

Disseminating the learning from action research

In September 2004, after a successful year researching the effect preferred learning styles was having on children in my year 3 class, I had the opportunity to inform my colleagues at Gallions of my findings and to encourage them to use the language of learning styles and visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (VAK) activities with their own classes.

I delivered a series of three Inset sessions early in the autumn term 2004. In the first session, we all completed a learning styles questionnaire to establish our own learning preferences. This generated a discussion about how individual learning styles can affect your teaching style and really allowed us to talk openly about our strengths and weaknesses in teaching and the impact this has on the children we teach.

This opportunity for reflection was particularly welcome at the beginning of an academic year, with new classes to teach. Staff at Gallions are always receptive to new ideas and the first Inset I delivered caused quite a buzz about learning styles; their potential for increasing children's self esteem and deepening their understanding in different ways.

During the second Inset, staff discussed how existing practice at Gallions was already responding to the need to accommodate different learning styles. We quickly established that our creative curriculum was ensuring a range of VAK activities in our lessons as we delivered learning objectives through the arts, in the form of 'research projects' which connect learning from different curriculum areas. I agreed with my colleagues that our creative curriculum had already made a huge difference to children's levels of engagement and their deepened subject knowledge but I felt we could do more. From my action research the previous academic year, I had discovered the benefits of sharing the language of learning styles with children to support them in developing their understanding of their own learning. The shared language of preferred learning styles had helped bond my class and I was keen for colleagues to try this with their classes. As a group, we had a lively debate about the pros and cons of 'labelling' children and of the need for children to experience a whole spectrum of VAK activities to aid their learning. It appeared that although staff embraced the principles of preferred learning styles they were more reluctant to use this language with the children.

For the final Inset, I produced a list of suggestions of different ways to incorporate preferred learning styles into lessons (see Tools section). This list of VAK activities was generally thought to be an effective checklist of how a classroom, infused with an understanding of preferred learning styles, might operate. Many teachers welcomed the new ideas, whilst for others it provided affirmation of what was already happening in their classrooms. During our discussions, the foundation stage teachers frequently reminded us that this play-based, experiential learning was at the heart of their practice. They suggested that we all needed to spend time in the nursery and reception classes where VAK activities are a natural part of teaching and learning. It is now school policy that we visit each others' classrooms more often, with a view to looking at creative teaching linked to learning styles and VAK. The headteacher advocates that all staff visit nursery and reception frequently.

At the end of the final Inset session, we again discussed the idea of conducting learning styles assessments with the children and decided that this would be left to the discretion of individual teachers.

Whole school development

Like all schools, different priorities emerge as the year continues and the spotlight on learning styles gradually faded as we turned our attention to other areas for development. However, through informal discussions with teachers it was clear that many of them had made changes to their practice after the Insets. Although the language of preferred learning styles was not always being shared with the children, teachers were using an increasing range of VAK activities in all their lessons, including literacy and numeracy. Further reinforcement occurred when as a school, we agreed to increase our children's entitlement to sport which included an additional daily ten minutes of outdoor games. Teachers observed how this physical activity improved concentration back in the classroom and began to utilise a greater range of kinaesthetic activities throughout the curriculum as a consequence.

In the autumn term 2004, every teacher worked with Tandem (a creative arts facilitation company consisting of practicing artists in the fields of dance, visual arts and theatre) to deliver learning objectives in science, humanities and religious education through a range of dance and visual arts disciplines. This helped place learning styles back on the agenda, particularly as our creative partners were so enthused by it and used the language in their delivery. Many teachers, when reflecting on the success of this project, spoke about how dance had given them further strategies to deliver VAK activities in their classroom. Teachers commented on how this focus on kinaesthetic and visual learning had been particularly supportive to individual children who may have struggled with aspects of learning in the past. As a result, the value of preferred learning styles as a shared language to discuss and describe learning became even more apparent.

The senior management team, in their observations of teaching, and in their scrutiny of planning, made direct reference to VAK, and it became an expectation that every lesson would involve a range of these activities.

Now, as we are coming to the end of an academic year, we have decided that alongside the usual data we pass to a new class teacher, like reading records and other forms of assessment, we will also pass on a record of the children's preferred learning styles. This has meant that our children have recently been reassessed, re-igniting the debate about how learning styles can change over time and therefore the need to assess children at least twice a year.

The majority of teachers have now opted to assess children's learning preferences with approximately half choosing to share this information with the children. By revisiting the assessment of learning styles, many teachers are questioning the extent to which a child's knowledge of their learning styles has impacted on their learning during the year. The debate about the importance of a shared language will no doubt continue at Gallions, as teachers and children continue to reflect on themselves as learners.

The lesson plan that follows demonstrates practical ways of incorporating VAK activities into everyday teaching and learning.

Gallions Primary School year 5/6

Learning Objective	Activity Including differentiation for SEN and EAL pupils	Key vocabulary
Geography objectives: To investigate recent or proposed changes in a locality To investigate how people affect the environment To use fieldwork skills	**Session 1** Look at recent copies of the Newham Recorder and discuss local news. Walk the children to the A13 flyover and look at the building of the new road. Discuss the impact on local residents and drivers of the road improvements. Record observations in pocket notebooks, in role as journalist.	News Current affairs Issues Local impact Road improvements Report Article
Drama objective: To use dramatic technique to explore events and characters	**Session 2 and 3** **Hot seating:** invite children to take on the role of local residents and drivers to discuss the environmental impact of the road improvements. Outline the views of the different parties as a stimulus for children to write reports on the issue. As a class, debate the issue, allocating opposing roles. Provide a writing frame for SEN children and support EAL children with visual images.	Questions Environmental Process
Art objective: To use art to investigate and explore issues	**Extension:** Ask the children to consider the environmental impact of the road building programme and using a piece of paper spilt into two, draw or paint the area before the road building and on the other half, after the completion. Encourage children to consider noise and air pollution, congestion and how the environment has been affected.	Noise Air pollution Congestion
Literacy objectives: To investigate news stories and prepare and deliver a short news bulletin	**Ongoing** **News desk:** Allow time each day for one group of children to research the day's news, using newspapers articles and the internet. Encourage the children to identify the main stories and prepare a short news bulletin to be shown to the rest of the class at the end of the day. Consider including a weather and sports report.	Research News bulletin

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

Nick Cannon, Creative Partnerships coordinator and senior teacher, Jubilee Primary School, Hackney

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.

	V	A	K	VA	VK	AK	VAK	NONE
Yellow Class year 1 **27 pupils**	10	1	5	1	3	2	0	5
Gold Class year 1 **30 pupils**	6	2	1	4	3	2	5	7
Grey Class year 2 **27 pupils**	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.

Digging up a Story

Peter Sanders, deputy headteacher and Creative Partnerships coordinator at Lauriston Primary School, Hackney and Aidan O'Kelly, year 6 class teacher

Introduction

At Lauriston we have been lucky to have been involved with Creative Partnerships for the past four years. A significant feature of all our projects over this time has been the complete unpredictability of outcomes. Through choosing creative partners with a willingness to talk, collaborate and revise what they were doing, outcomes were in each case unique, original and unexpected. The overall aim for the four years has been to improve children's spoken and written work, through providing original and unusual stimuli.

The school

Lauriston is an average size, inner city primary school with a nursery. It serves a culturally and socially diverse community. Pupils are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being of white British heritage. Approximately 29 languages are spoken and one in three pupils does not speak English as their first language. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is high and more pupils than average have learning difficulties and disabilities. (Ofsted 2006)

The project

In September 2004, Lauriston joined the second year of Creative Partnerships London East's Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme. Digging up a Story was devised as part of this programme. The idea was for our year 6 class to spend one day a week for a term digging up parts of the environmental garden with an archaeologist and making sense of what they found with the help of a storyteller and a visual artist. The basic tenet was that every object we found would have a story attached to it, however simple, and it was the job of the team to develop these stories, using their own skills. For the children the aim was to encourage a flexible and imaginative approach to telling and writing stories.

Digging up a Story was a single project that involved three creative partners working together towards a common goal. The partners were Chris Tripp, archaeologist, Helen Marshall, visual artist working for The Photographers' Gallery and Roberto Lagnado, storyteller. They came to the project with very different skills and expectations. Each had ideas about what they wanted to achieve and how they might go about it. However, by its very nature there was no certainty about how the project would develop.

As work progressed and some interesting finds were made (a pocket watch, a fragment of a two hundred year old pot, hundreds of bone handled tooth brushes) the individual creative partners developed a trust and empathy with each other. Working together they saw what each could bring to the project, and, equally importantly, how the practice of others could affect and improve their own way of working. Each began to see his or her discipline differently in the light of what the others were doing. There developed a generosity and curiosity between everyone involved in the project that promoted risk-taking and experimentation that I feel sure would not have emerged had the partners been working independently.

Factors for success

We were very fortunate that Creative Partnerships funding enabled us to commission the creative partners, but it became apparent that this type of project could be undertaken successfully with very few resources. For the visual element we used digital cameras and a basic scanner. Children used drawing for a range of purposes (analytically, to record finds; interrogatively, to try and work out the whole picture; imaginatively, building up possible stories around the artefacts that had been dug up). They went on to work with paint, clay, scrap materials and film. Alongside this work, sometimes inspired by it and at other times being the inspiration for visual work; the children wrote and told stories. All the work they did was their own. They were not being channelled into a prescribed way of working nor were they using techniques or equipment that were unfamiliar. What made the project special was how these elements combined.

A key factor for success during the project was the willingness of the class teacher (with the support of the management team) to rearrange the timetable where necessary. The creative partners came in on Mondays so it was agreed that if necessary the whole day could be spent by groups of children following through one idea. This allowed for natural development and created opportunity for discussion, reflection, consensus and collaboration in a real life setting.

This class contained two children with statements of special educational needs, which meant that there were two extra adults in the room at all times. This was a great help as both the learning support assistants were completely committed to the project and had excellent relationships with all the children in the class. For one teacher to work in this way without extra support would be very hard as most elements involved children working in small groups and at times away from the classroom.

The classroom was converted into a workshop every Monday. Tools, materials for construction, art materials and computers were all made available. We were fortunate to have the use of an additional classroom during the mornings so we tended to divide the class into quiet and more active groups. There were always enough adults to supervise in the two rooms and this task-led division created a much more focused and calm working environment for everyone.

With just a little imagination and cooperation on the part of the children it was possible to set up the various 'stations' to enable them to work independently. It helped greatly having the creative partners with some of those groups but when they were not available the children coped well once they had worked out what they wanted to do.

Children's routes through the project

All the children loved the digging, demonstrating a strong liking for kinaesthetic learning. Following the digging and finding of artefacts, children quickly gravitated to the activity that best suited their learning styles. Initially, a few children found the freedom of choice hard to deal with but most recognised how they worked best and settled happily into their own chosen learning style, showing a confidence and focus not always apparent in their normal classroom practice.

Some children were very clear about how they wanted to explore their findings and responded by making – in clay, card and wood. Other children responded to the narrative element of their finds. Some wrote extraordinary stories but others, given the opportunity to work away from pencil and paper, performed their stories in front of a video camera. The results were really exciting and came from children who had not previously shown signs of being particularly strong auditory learners.

A number of children were captivated by the visual effects possible from using the scanner. Once taught by Helen how to use the machine and manipulate images and colour, they were flying. They quickly became the recognised experts by everyone else in the class.

Conclusion

The metaphorical quality of the project extended far beyond its title. Apart from physically digging to unearth artefacts from which they could develop images, other artefacts and stories, pupils and creative partners were engaging in a metaphor for learning itself. In particular, the nature of their involvement resonated with Howard Gardner's observation that the traditional approach to teaching and learning tends to be concerned with what subjects are being covered, whereas a more creative approach centres on uncovering or discovering. For creative partners, teachers and pupils alike, one of the key benefits of the project was its capacity to uncover depths of imagination, creativity, talent, understanding and collaboration within and between the participants.

Reflections from Aidan O'Kelly, the class teacher involved in Digging up a Story, on integrating preferred learning styles and creativity into his teaching beyond the project.

Over the past three years I've become interested in learning styles, as I am always conscious of trying to make learning engaging. At the same time there is a tension: having 'bums on seats' and setting standard work are often the best way of keeping sane. Allowing for different learning styles involves a degree of risk and what some would label 'disorder'.

Overall however, I try to ensure a varied approach to teaching. I find maths hardest to subdivide into learning style activities and I find literacy easiest. I like role play, but have lately tried to incorporate 'sound' into literacy. It's very much experimental and is only a modest step, for example, children writing on a theme (animals in rural Jamaica) and reading and performing these, accompanied by music/sound they and/or their partner creates. The main problems, as always, are ideas and inspiration. When I'm busy or tired, it's more difficult to diversify and be imaginative.

Finally, I firmly believe that we should regard 'ability' as outmoded and look instead at learning styles – a child who isn't good 'on paper' can often be very talented orally and kinaesthetically.

When the eyes meet the ears and hands

Janice McLaren, projects organiser at The Photographers' Gallery, writes about how visual artist Helen Marshall introduced different media and entry points in the Digging up a Story project at Lauriston Primary School, Hackney

Introduction

Preferred learning styles are often broken into three categories (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic) and we might assume that most visual artists would employ the first of these categories as their preferred method of both learning and teaching. We might also believe that those young people who would benefit most from working alongside a visual artist would be children whose preferred learning style leaned toward the visual. This wasn't entirely the case, however, during the Digging up a Story project at Lauriston Primary School.

The artist and her role

Digging up a Story took place over 12 sessions with a class of year 6 pupils. Three external professionals; a storyteller, an archaeologist and a visual artist; worked alongside two of the school's teachers to lead the pupils in a journey of discovery and imagination in relation to an archaeological dig on the school grounds. A number of activities were introduced (storytelling, scanning and, later, video) in order to offer pupils different ways in to thinking about what was being unearthed just outside their classroom window. Victorian pottery shards, toothbrush handles, one hundred year old nails and even the outer ring of a pocket watch became the inspiration for stories and artwork.

Helen Marshall is a visual artist who mainly uses photography and film, and has worked with The Photographers' Gallery on a number of occasions. Helen was asked to join the Digging up a Story project because of her experience in collaborative projects, and on the basis of work she had produced, in collaboration with a number of older individuals, in which a scanner was used to record a series of small, cherished objects. In this project each scan was used to produce poster-sized photographs – transforming a tiny keepsake into something of comparably colossal proportions. It was felt that transforming an object in this way might serve as a good base for the project's concurrent storytelling sessions, as well as providing a 'visual glue' that could pull the results of the project together for a final presentation. It would also serve as a visual entry point for learning.

Helen's preferred learning styles approach

Helen has developed projects in a variety of contexts including schools, colleges, prisons and hospitals. As she has said, 'In my practice as an artist in residence, I try to consider as many points of entry to a project as possible – to be ambitious yet make it accessible. I have rarely thought about this within a pedagogical framework beyond the research and planning time that is given to that particular project.'

Despite often introducing multiple points of entry into previous collaborative work, Helen had never before linked them to the preferred learning styles approach. It wasn't until she began to notice posters up around the school, identifying and promoting the preferred learning styles system, that she began to understand why and how the Digging up a Story project had been 'masterminded'.

Helen saw her role in the project as complementing the skills and resources the teachers and other professionals were able to offer. She planned to introduce the digital technology skills of scanning and the use of

Photoshop software as a way of linking and transforming objects found during the school dig with storytelling sessions.

Introducing film to the mix

One medium that was introduced part of the way into the project, and initially as a device for recording evidence, was film. Some of the pupils seemed to be easily distracted and were having difficulties settling into the object scanning sessions. Helen noticed this and commented, 'further into the project, I became aware that some of the pupils had not become as engaged with the visual process as they were with the other activities that involved more noise, physical displacement and movement around the project environment.'

When film was introduced these pupils quickly became interested and engaged in documenting the stories they had created as part of the project. They captured themselves with some quite startling results, drawing on the medium's strength for creating an atmosphere, through cropping and lighting, to record their dark and inventive tales of the underworld.

On reflection, the use of film seemed to be tapping into a kinaesthetic mode of learning. Teachers remarked upon how these pupils' behaviour dramatically changed when they began to use the camera.

Helen is quick to stress that the timing for introducing film to the project was crucial. 'The camera was brought in following the development of other aspects of the project and, because of its popular uptake, it may have dominated or precluded the benefits of the project if it had been introduced earlier.'

Film was added to the project as a route into learning and Helen felt it was equally important that the pupils had a choice about whether film should feature in the final presentation of their work. As she says, 'It was interesting to note that several of the pupils who might have been most readily categorised as 'disaffected' within the classroom, spontaneously led and took charge of the screening during the final presentation and astounded some of those around who knew them.'

This raises the question about how the presentation of work, and work in progress, can also link into children's preferred learning styles, and into learning itself. The work in progress was often shared during the weeks leading up to the final presentation and this was something that the pupils came to expect and look forward to. Pupils were involved in, and witnessed each other, performing, listening and looking as the project progressed. This mirrored a professional artist's own approach to working and presenting their work. Helen remarks that within art 'to learn, is to make, is to celebrate.'

Looking back, thinking ahead

Helen's own approach to working with others has been altered through thinking about the way the pupils at Lauriston took up different routes to learning. Helen identified her own preferred learning style to veer toward the visual and auditory, which has given her cause for concern. 'Could it be, then, that I facilitate others' learning in the styles through which I also learn best? I have not considered this before. It puts a new perspective on how I might approach facilitating learning in the future. It also makes me increasingly mindful of the tools and media I choose to employ within a creative project.'

Helen's advice to others thinking about using the preferred learning styles approach in a creative project is to ensure that all partners enter into formal discussions about the different entry points to learning that pupils will be offered. She also stressed that those entry points need to inspire the interest of the groups but that the tools shouldn't eclipse the learning.

An awareness of what each of the other professionals can offer, including those particular and sometimes hidden skills and experiences of teachers, will help to ensure that if a pupil isn't engaging in a project one way there are options to learn via other equally valid routes.

Helen concludes her own experience: 'Knowledge of preferred learning styles has made me more conscious of the common formulas or methods I have used within my approach as an artist over the years, in participatory and educational contexts. It has broadened my understanding of how these methods could be underpinned by what I understand of the preferred learning styles framework, and how it might open up a new area of enquiry in terms of the whole of my practice and my pursuits as an artist.'

Developing one school's vision

Kevin McDonnell, headteacher, Stormont House School, Hackney

The school

Stormont House School is a mixed special school for pupils aged 11-16 with a wide range of special educational needs. There is a wide ethnic mix among the students who come from Hackney and eight neighbouring London boroughs. Department for Education and Skills value-added scores place the school in the top 5% of schools nationally.

Developing the vision

As I reflect on the impact of the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme on Stormont House, I am repeatedly drawn to the development of a vision for the school as one of the principal outcomes.

Prior to becoming the headteacher of the school in July 2003, I shied away from the 'v' word, largely because I was not comfortable with what I then saw as its connotations – political spin, management speak, hollowness and rhetoric. All that changed, however, as soon as I was appointed to the headship. Now the buck stopped with me; if any aspect of the school was stalling I had a key part to play in moving things forward.

As my appointment more or less coincided with the start of our involvement in the preferred learning styles programme, it remains strongly associated with the way in which I felt empowered to envision the school's future journey. It is no exaggeration to say that the programme acted as a catalyst for my emerging sense of where I wanted to take the school; it was fundamental to the shaping of my vision. The programme strengthened the appreciation (by myself and others) of the importance of individuality and diversity. I think these are issues of general significance within education. For a special school like Stormont House, their significance is amplified, not least because they encourage a shift in critical gaze, from learning difficulties to learning differences.

The preferred learning styles programme worked as a catalyst at a number of levels owing to a number of distinct features. These included the composition of the programme group, the group's way of working, and both the opportunity and time to reflect. The group was made up of people with different roles from different schools, as well as members of the Creative Partnerships London East team and the consultants. As a group we were exposed to many different perspectives and interpretations. The common focus on creativity and learning styles bound the group and programme together but what drove it forward for me was the genuine and open debate of key issues and the challenge to generate innovative solutions to situations in school.

One of the key areas where this experience is having an impact at Stormont House is the way in which continuing professional development is being viewed. What I would term 'the structured informality' of the programme group (encouraging exploration of creative and, as yet untried, practice while maintaining a clear focus) is being replicated by my staff. As a consequence, they are more likely to engage in study or action research groups than to adopt off-the-shelf solutions and packages. Staff are also more ready to explore and change their practice; to work together to make a difference. This is not a wholly new development solely attributable to the action research programme; rather, it is a process that has been strengthened and extended because of our engagement with the programme.

In the pressurised world that is school leadership in the 21st century, headteachers should be forgiven for becoming exclusively pre-occupied with the daily detail of the school community. However, thinking time and space away from the school (and I do not just mean during evening and weekends at home) strikes me as vital for headteachers' capacity to see the

big picture and visualise the need for change. Clearly, the preferred learning styles programme gave me some of that time and space, not only in group meetings and contact with the link consultant, but also through a research trip to America (New York State and Oklahoma). Although away from the daily grind, this was no 'jolly', but an intense and intensive experience, during which ideas were variously floated, challenged and crystallised.

There is a temptation when visiting other schools, especially in a different authority or, as in this case, a different country, to be seduced into thinking that any good practice you see is a 'must have'. The fact that the project group visited America having already established a clear set of hypotheses and a rationale for development may have acted as a defence against that seduction. So, the value of what I observed was not how easily it could be imported to a special school in Hackney, but in its use as a medium for reflecting on and challenging the direction in which Stormont House was heading. The research trip was arguably the most influential part of the action research project in terms of my clarifying a vision for the school.

The ongoing discussions with group members of different theoretical and practical frameworks allowed us to adopt the role of critical friends with the opportunity to ask each other 'how?' 'why?' or 'why not?' I reached the point where I was able to say to a colleague who did not know my school very well, 'I want my school to be…'

Now the cat was out of the bag, and I found the words to express the other parts of my vision. The next conundrum was how to move from my vision to a shared vision, beginning with a presentation to all staff on returning to school. Their response was positive, I think partly due

to the honest nature of what was being presented as well as to its content. In the event, the process was relatively straightforward. The staff and, as importantly, the governors had ample time to reflect and contribute and all were reassured that I had not found a 'better' school that I wanted us to mimic. Responses and engagement were generally positive and several people spoke of the excitement of the challenge. At the end of the process (if there ever is truly an end to this type of activity) we emerged with a shared vision for the school:

Achievement for all

In a unique small school for students who learn differently

By placing creativity at the centre of teaching and learning, breaking down the barriers between subjects

With a staff of skilled reflective practitioners, who are themselves continually learning.

Although I had long since lost my reservations about 'vision', if these words were not to be consigned to the landfill of rhetoric, they needed to be translated into actions that could be observed as making a real difference. An impending Ofsted inspection created a relatively early opportunity for us to test the relationship between vision and practice. Among many positive comments in their report, the inspectors noted:

The school has established a challenging vision of 'Achievement for all' and the creation of an innovative curriculum which breaks down the barriers between subjects, allowing students to apply knowledge and understanding gained from one subject to another and to meet, and often exceed, the challenging targets set for their academic and personal progress. The school is well on track to realise this vision and, as a result, the achievement of pupils of all ages, abilities and backgrounds is excellent in information and communication technology and very good in English, mathematics, science, religious education and art.

And made further reference to:

…a very clear and exciting vision of an exemplary curriculum in which creativity is central to learning, the barriers between subjects are broken down and all students achieve very well. This philosophy has resulted in a highly successful collaboration with Creative Partnerships, an organisation which enables the school to work with outside professionals such as artists and designers to enrich and develop the curriculum.

While an Ofsted inspection is not the only form of meaningful validation, this feedback has been a source of further encouragement for the ideas we have been exploring and implementing over the last couple of years. The Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme has been a spur to innovation and change but it would be wrong to conclude that there has been a personal or collective 'Road to Damascus' experience. I think it highly unlikely that a refreshed vision for the school could be translated into quality practice, were it not for what had already been established.

Stormont House School has for some time had a good record of moving forward through praxis. We are prepared to take risks in our learning and to encourage students to do likewise, flex our wing muscles, make mistakes and learn from them. We may have already favoured reflection and evaluation based on questions like 'What do you think about what you saw, heard or did?' and 'How will what you saw, heard or did impact on what you do next?' However, the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme has guaranteed that we will continue to use enquiry and evidence as the basis for further development.

A personal journey through preferred learning styles

Animateur Hannah Joyce talks about the challenges of working in a preferred learning styles framework at Stormont House School, Hackney

The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be lighted Plutarch

Introduction

My exploration of learning styles began with a Creative Partnerships project at Stormont House School. Stormont House is one of the most challenging schools I have ever worked in and I have learnt a huge amount being involved there. There is a need for a high level of individualised learning and teaching. Many drama techniques that I have successfully used in other schools break down because of the students' particular needs. It has made me search deeper within myself to find access routes for students' learning and truly recognise the value of preferred learning styles. This has been the beginning of a journey, which is now taking me on to look at the research around emotional intelligence, thinking skills and multiple intelligences. Learning styles are, I believe, just one of the many ways in which we, as practitioners, should think about learning in the classroom.

After working as a teacher in a north London secondary school, I left mainstream teaching to freelance for opera and theatre companies, and pursue my love for singing. Over the last seven years I have worked in a variety of educational settings and have experienced some rich learning exchanges with young people, toddlers, elders, parents and teachers.

At first it was liberating to leave full time, formal teaching as I felt I could be more creative. I was swept up on my new trail of taking opera, theatre

and musical experiences to young people. At the time I did not think about the learning experience at any deep level and it was reward enough to see young people inspired and excited. However, my involvement with the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme came at a time when I was doing more work directly for schools, looking at creativity and drama as routes to accelerate learning. Whilst the urge to make the work exciting, creative and inspiring is still there, I want to know whether the learning exchange can be more than 'one moment of magic'.

Thinking about preferred learning styles

In general, our education system groups children according to age, not ability, interest or needs. Knowledge is packaged within subjects where we classify what is important. We spend a set amount of time learning something before we move on to the next lesson and at the end of a predetermined amount of time we take a test. This is usually written and completed in silence. We look at the results of the test and someone, who may or may not know us, makes a judgement about what we know. Learning becomes about knowing and our curriculum is content and test driven. The work around learning styles and creativity challenges all of this. Learners need to have a mixed diet of activities in their school day so that all their senses are stimulated. I am no longer satisfied

with learning being about knowing; it also has to be about a deeper level of enquiry and understanding. How to address individualised needs within a large system and how to produce a dynamic, flexible creative workforce is the never-ending challenge of the future.

When I started thinking about learning styles I realised that intuitively I had been working in a multi-sensory way. This is partly to do with the nature of working as an animateur. Workshops have an informality about them, which makes them very flexible, and they may take place away from a classroom, for example in a hall where pupils have the space to move around and physicalise their ideas. I often work in a team, with artists of other disciplines, and we combine elements of the visual, the aural and the kinaesthetic without really having to think about it. As outsiders visiting a school we are not under the same pressures as a teacher and it is therefore easier for us to be experimental and to try new creative ideas.

Much of the theory about preferred learning styles struck me as common sense; if you believe that we all learn in different ways then it makes sense to vary the approaches to learning. There is nothing more disconcerting than looking at a room of blank or bored faces. The 'way in' is crucial. How many lessons tend to start with a series of verbal instructions? This programme has heightened my awareness of how much I talk and how much I ask questions. I am trying to develop the quality of my questioning as this I feel is critical to extending thinking. The environment in which we learn is important and visual prompts and clues around a classroom can really help learners. Asking a question as well as writing it up on the board is beneficial. The advantage of considering that students have different learning styles is that lessons immediately become more varied and, as a result, more engaging.

Using drama in the classroom

In practical terms, a learning styles approach involves greater preparation on the part of the teacher and my sitting room seems to be in a continual state of Blue Peter readiness. I make more props, I search out higher quality resources and I plan in such a way as to keep students on the move.

I have become convinced that more kinaesthetic learning activities need to take place in classrooms. Interestingly, many teachers who are unfamiliar with drama seem afraid to use it in their classrooms. They tell me that the noise level rises and that they feel as if they are amid chaos. Drama can be noisy and can appear chaotic but if you look more closely, pupils are actively engaged and out of the seeming chaos, positive outcomes emerge.

Drama is, in my opinion, an under used and neglected skill in teaching. Drama allows all learners to be actively engaged in their learning. The use of language in drama is highly 'situational' and through it young people are able to take on new roles, interact with others, learn language and discover new meanings. Following their engagement with drama, students are often able to write more enthusiastically and imaginatively. Another benefit is that students appear to enjoy learning more, and the research that has been produced on emotional intelligence supports the view that enjoyment is an important disposition for learning to take place.

A comment that has been made to me by several young people is, 'that was fun! Better than doing work'. I remember replying almost indignantly the first time, 'but you have been working'. I was frustrated that they thought they had been playing not working. However, now I welcome these comments as I want students to feel that learning is fun.

Full circle

While working at Stormont House, I have devised new ways of teaching and not all of them have worked. To be truly creative, risks need to be taken and this can result in things going wrong. Wouldn't it be strange if we started seeing wrong as a possible right? A possible right because it may be wrong in one context but not in another; or what is wrong to one person may appear right to another. I believe that getting things wrong can lead to greater understanding.

In many ways things have gone full circle for me. Being part of this programme has contributed to a desire to return to teaching full-time in a school. I want to put what I have learnt into practice in a classroom setting where I can build up sustained and valued relationships with a group of young people.

Introduction

I work for Bow Arts Trust, an independent arts education provider in east London. We are primarily a visual arts organisation, but believe that creativity can be experienced across a wide spectrum of activities. Our work in schools reflects this by using a cross-artform approach to promote creativity across subjects and work disciplines.

The school

Central Foundation Girls' School is a larger than average inner city school in Tower Hamlets serving an area of high social deprivation. It is a Performing Arts Specialist College and has recently been awarded a second specialism in Citizenship and English. A very large proportion of the pupils have a minority ethnic heritage and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is high. There are currently fewer identified pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities than normally found (Ofsted 2006).

The project

The aim was to make creative interventions to year 7 English lessons and explore new teaching strategies that would allow access points for all learners in the classroom. In the first term we teamed performance poet Jared Louche and visual artist Emily Allchurch with teachers to explore new ways of teaching poetry using visual and performance techniques. In the second term we paired storyteller June Peters with digital artist Jane Bailey to create character film diaries in response to the novel, 'Two weeks with the Queen', and then developed media skills and an understanding of audience by retelling a traditional story on film to a range of audiences.

Creative interventions in the English faculty

Annie Bicknell, head of education at Bow Arts Trust reflects on the experiences of the practitioners who worked at Central Foundation Girls' School, Tower Hamlets

Providing access for all learning preferences

All too often in secondary schools, academic subjects like English are taught in a way that opens the door to auditory learners through verbal instruction and to some degree to visual learners through reading. Traditionally however, few strategies are employed to engage kinaesthetic learners. It is perhaps no surprise therefore to find that students labelled as troublesome or disaffected in mainstream schools are often kinaesthetic learners. In this project, we used a range of simple techniques to facilitate practical activity and movement in each session.

When we arrived at school the seating was arranged in rows, which felt fixed and restrictive. We always re-arranged the furniture. Re-organising the students' physical space helped break down inhibitions. The elimination of desks and conventional teaching paraphernalia seemed to produce a favourable climate for experimentation.

We gave students the opportunity to have a hands-on relationship with the materials in the project. We found that for some students physically holding objects made it easier for them to share their ideas about these items. One girl (with a kinaesthetic learning preference), for example, was able to explain to the rest of the group all the functions of a video camera when holding the camera, but without it was unable to articulate such instructions to her peers.

'Unless individuals take a very active role in what it is that they're studying, unless they learn to ask questions, to do things hands on, to essentially recreate things in their own mind and transform them as is needed, the ideas just disappear.' Howard Gardner, 1997 on Multiple Intelligences and New Forms of Assessment.

In the poetry sessions, visual and kinaesthetic learners extended their language base by experimenting with materials and then finding the words to describe what they were doing: exposing shiny fabric to sunlight; 'a shimmering sun', crumpling cellophane; 'rustling leaves in a tree'. Students made striking analogies based on their direct experiences with colour; 'a dark drink from an indigo lemon'; and texture; 'the sea is a soft ripe blueberry'. Students wrote poems about the sea in this way:

The sea is
God's puddles
sprinkling showers
big blue beard
attached to a sandy chin
shimmering puddles
reflection of the sky
a cracking mirror
shiny blue silk
against the shimmering sun
a royal blue coat
our uniforms

When learning about novels, students took on the roles of the different characters in the book, interviewed each other in role, and filmed one another doing this. The assumption of another identity helped them to lose self-consciousness and engage with the subject. This not only provided an access point for the kinaesthetic learners but also freed up the auditory learners to be more expressive.

Discussion around our own learning preferences and experiences helped inform approaches used in the project. Three partners, for example, realised that they had lost confidence in writing at secondary school when it became analytical and based on the experience of others, rather than based on lived experience or imagination. All three partners remembered, however, excelling at creative writing at primary school. To address this, we ensured that we were drawing on the students' own experiences and imaginations by using creative visualisation techniques and encouraging them to relate their own experiences to the core themes. Students' poems about love drew on these techniques.

Extending understanding of preferred learning styles

Before the project commenced, all partners (teachers and artists) attended a training day outside the school. We all agreed that this initial day was crucial to bring everyone involved on board, to provide us all with a refreshed and up to date understanding of learning styles and to help the team to gel. That day we became familiar with our own learning preferences together with an understanding of that of our colleagues. This shared knowledge, paired with an appreciation that we all learn differently, was a great foundation on which to build a project. Another essential feature of the project was giving the participating teachers the opportunity to try out the techniques themselves so that they acquired the skills and confidence to continue to use them in future lessons.

Our increased knowledge of preferred learning styles led us to pair partners with different learning styles and abilities so that they could learn from each other. This enabled practitioners to step out of their comfort zone into the unknown of the other person's creative zone, which, being unfamiliar, has the potential to be highly creative territory. We adopted similar strategies with the students.

Students found it empowering to assess their own learning styles. Having this knowledge gave them the power to articulate their own learning needs, both to their peers when working in a group, and to the teachers or artists in the classroom. When in groups, it was clear how knowledge of learning styles helped students distribute roles. Initially students chose roles that matched their learning style. Then, as a result of observing peers with different learning styles, their confidence grew and they were able to try out roles which were less 'safe' for them and which required more self-discipline. For example, when students were filming they were able to organise their own production teams, identifying who wanted to act, who wanted to use the camera and who wanted to take care of sound. As the project progressed, students observed their peers and developed the confidence to exchange roles.

One of the creative partners reflected on this group dynamic:

I found that grouping the students was really useful… so that you had each learning style represented. It was fascinating to watch the way that they traded information. And the way that those groupings worked against the natural friendship choices… required them to work in a whole new group dynamic; and focus not on the friendship structure, but on an education and learning structure; and on an information sharing structure. It pushed them to work hard, to work creatively and to find in each other strengths that they would not normally have found or sought out.

Tangible outcomes

For students

Students' self-confidence was increased. Before the project, 25% of 120 students considered themselves to be confident, and this rose to 70% at the end of the project. One of the English teachers reflected on this: 'They came out of it with a better sense of self worth… as everyone had a chance to express themselves, to say I am strong in this particular area, I can do that.'

All the teachers reported increased levels of engagement with the subject: 'I thought the students were more switched on than in previous lessons where it was more book work and videos… but in trying to appeal to each of these students' learning styles, I seem to get more out of them so I think I'll definitely keep this going.'

Students' enthusiasm for English and writing in particular showed a marked increase.

One of the teachers described how knowledge of preferred learning styles helped students take responsibility for their own learning:

'As well as them being able to say 'I'm not really getting this, can we do it a different way?'…the student can also think 'why aren't I engaging with this or why don't I understand this?' and actually that encourages them to take responsibility.'

All these factors; confidence, engagement, enthusiasm and ownership; led to progress in the quality of work, with 30% of the students recording significant improvements in class work.

For teachers

One of the teachers stated that her practice would be helped because the preferred learning styles framework 'takes away from the personal, to an extent. If something isn't working, it's not 'what have I/we/they done wrong?' But 'what are the preferred learning styles involved? How can we use this knowledge to understand and change the situation?'

Another stated that her practice would be enhanced by 'being open to different forms of planning – sketches, written ideas and planning through experimenting with the materials themselves.'

Teachers translated their learning from the project into top tips for others:

- an understanding of preferred learning styles helps you realise that one size does not fit all in teaching and learning

- when working with text or notes, encourage students to use diagrams, arrows, colour coding etc to help understanding and recall

- allow some lessons to be student-led; giving time for discussion, experimentation and discovery

- introduce a time for movement during every lesson; it could be an active game or a hands-on activity and will benefit all learners, not just those with a kinaesthetic preference

In conclusion

In setting up the projects, we paired artists with extraordinarily disparate talents and learning styles. At the very beginning, one pair was not even sure they would be able to work together. But by the end, one said 'We became different role models for students to observe, both equally valid. In this way we were able to cover all angles and deliver a series of exciting, dynamic and inclusive sessions.'

The contrast between the charismatic performance poet, whose sessions were 'flying by the seat of his pants', and the meticulous, sensitive visual artist with an eye for detail, demonstrated to students in the most unequivocal terms the validity of different kinds of minds and different ways of working. It also demonstrated that not only is there room on the train for every kind of learner, but that the train's speed and destination derive from the diversity of sensitivities and learning styles on board.

Institutional change

Comparing the experience of two schools
committed to the change process

Introduction

Two practitioners in different schools, one a headteacher and one an advanced skills teacher, both:

- formulated action research to develop the analysis and use of preferred learning styles

- made use of Creative Partnerships approaches to explore the nature of creativity and its resulting role in the classroom

- challenged attitudes and assumptions about the role of creative practitioners and creative pedagogy across the curriculum

- utilised knowledge gained to bring about change in approaches to teaching and learning in a creative learning community

Commentaries on the change process

Kevin McDonnell, headteacher, Stormont House School

My appointment as headteacher coincided with the school's entry into the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme. My challenge was to move from being deputy and then acting headteacher of a successful school to formulating and declaring my personal vision for the school as headteacher. An integral part of that vision was to challenge assumptions about 'learning difficulties' and develop the concept of 'learning difference'. I was fortunate in having an excellent leadership team and a very skilled and talented staff. The credit for the actual changes belongs mainly with all those staff team who continue to take their own creative risks in developing teaching and learning possibilities.

Stormont House School context

Stormont House School is a mixed special school for students aged 11-16 years with a wide range of special educational needs. There is a wide ethnic mix among the students who come from Hackney and eight neighbouring London boroughs. 'The school expands very well pupils' horizons of what it is possible for them to achieve in both their learning and their personal development. The school provides a rich, varied and innovative curriculum' (Ofsted 2005). DfES value-added scores place us in the top 5% of schools nationally. Working with Creative Partnerships London East has been indispensable in developing a shared vision for our school.

Change approaches that worked

- grounding my vision for the school in what I honestly believe will give the students the best possible deal

- building on existing strengths of the school as well as identifying areas for development

- articulating and discussing my belief in the reasons for, and the process of, change to all stakeholders so that a shared vision is reached

- ensuring the change is integral to the shared vision and woven through the school development plan

- using a combination of high profile, highly public 'declarations' and individual time with staff

- using external critical friends to creatively retain objectivity, focus and momentum (Paul Howard, the preferred learning styles consultant was invaluable here)

- creative change involves supporting staff to take risks, learning from mistakes as well as successes

Lessons I learnt about the change process

- take the risk of exploring what you really believe in and communicate it honestly without preaching

- respond as thoughtfully to criticism as praise

- it is not necessary for everybody to be enthusiastic about all aspects of change

- listen more than you speak, learn more than you teach

- a series of small successes across the school is bigger than the sum of its parts

- change takes time and energy, but also creates excitement and satisfaction when successful

- monitor the process without confining staff creativity

Impact and outcomes at school level

The following are extracts from the school's 2005 Ofsted inspection report:

- a very clear and exciting vision of an exemplary curriculum

- this vision is shared and understood by all members of the school community

- students talk especially enthusiastically about… the school's work with Creative Partnerships

- creativity and innovation flourish in the school and enable the pupils to achieve so very well.'

- development of practice to reflect an understanding of preferred learning styles

External validation of impact and outcomes

- a representative of the creative sector has joined the governing body and its development and curriculum committee

- local authority advisers have had very positive visits to the school

- feedback from artists has been overwhelmingly positive, one has been inspired to return to teaching

- Stormont House is an outstanding school [that] provides excellent value for money. (Ofsted 2005)

- Creative Partnerships independent panel approved substantial funding for Change Agenda project for 2005-06 academic year

Impact and outcomes at a personal level

- validation after taking the risk of sharing my personal vision with all staff and governors

- excitement at seeing new approaches to teaching and learning develop and embed

- learning to let go sufficiently to allow others to develop their own creative leadership skills and processes

- realising the importance of establishing structures that support creativity, which might appear a contradiction

- validation of vision and leadership style and substance by Ofsted was also very significant

It sounds simplistic, but true change is more likely to be successful if you actually believe in it. The headteacher is uniquely placed in a school to effect and affect change. No person is better placed to appreciate the often varied range of demands from government, local authorities, governors, parents and carers, staff and students. These demands can often be a barrier to true change as headteachers can respond reactively rather than having opportunities to reflect at a deeper level. When I presented my personal vision to staff I was more nervous than I'd been in a very long time. Their positive response was, I think, partly due to its honesty as well its content. Working with Creative Partnerships London East, and particularly as part of the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme, has both challenged and supported my own development as a headteacher. We're still working on structures and systems that can support and promote creative steps towards our vision – that sustain 'buzz' but avoid 'fizzle'.

Mary Huane, advanced skills teacher in drama (until summer 2005), Islington Arts and Media School

I led a whole school change initiative developing the use of experiential learning across the curriculum, incorporating an understanding of preferred learning styles and creativity. The aim was to develop the use of arts pedagogy using creative practitioners to support the development of learning, and bring the classroom to life by offering different learning opportunities. My experience of managing change comes from the perspective of a middle manager (advanced skills teacher in drama) within the school system. The following reflections outline what was successful in my approach, what failed so miserably it is almost embarrassing to mention (but that is how lessons are learnt) and finally, what I believe the school gained from the change.

Islington Arts and Media School context

Islington Arts and Media School is a mixed comprehensive for students aged 11-16 years situated in the heart of Finsbury Park, and has a very diverse multi-cultural intake. It is a Fresh Start school in its sixth year of existence, and has raised performance at exams from 4% A*-C to 47% A*-C in five years. The 'innovative approach to learning' (Ofsted 2004) has helped the journey, and placing creativity as a learning tool to make the classroom come alive and imaginative contributes to this success. The ongoing development of this work has been supported through the partnership with Creative Partnerships London East.

Change approaches that worked

- the change must be integral to the school's development plan

- senior management must enable middle mangers to be innovative and take risks

- the vision for change must be shared with all school stakeholders, and then the mission to implement the change developed and owned by all stakeholders

- there must be passion and a commitment to the change

- there needs to be a synergy of change that creates excitement and managed chaos

- use of an objective lens (external to the school) to act as a critical friend

- ask for criticism of your change plans

- take the change step by step; better a small positive change than a large mediocre one

Lessons I learnt about the change process

- don't assume your enthusiasm for the change will be shared by all

- realise different stakeholders need different support, and this is not dependant on age or experience

- don't hold back singing about your success, but ensure the singing is about the change and not the people

- don't over-personalise the change

Impact and outcomes at school level

- senior management own the learning change

- training in arts methodology and preferred learning styles part of school development plan

- students' attainment and interest in school has significantly increased

- creative practitioners now an integral part of the learning community

- an innovative approach to learning through the arts and media curriculum is raising pupils' aspirations, confidence and pride in their school

External validation of impact outcomes

- governing body established an arts and media committee to monitor the work

- local authority advisors have visited and evaluated the work, Inset has been provided to other schools

- creative practitioners and arts agencies changed their approach to developing projects, one now training to be a teacher

- Creative Partnerships independent panel approved substantial funding for Change Agenda project bid for 2005-06 academic year

- Ofsted refer to the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity programme, 'There is evidence that more innovative learning strategies are developing as the project impacts positively on the effectiveness of teaching.'
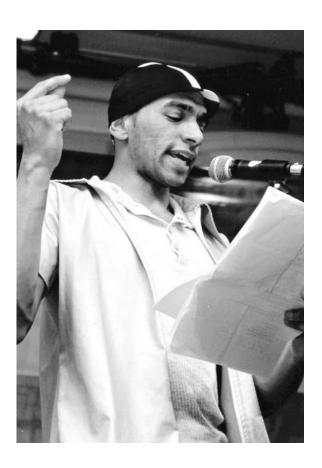
Impact and outcomes at a personal level

- increased awareness of my own preferred learning style

- validated my personal vision on experiential learning

- increased personal and professional confidence resulting in promotion to the leadership team in a new school

- developed my use of data to analyse impact of change

- delivered training sessions at a national level

- headteacher recommended National Professional Qualification for Headship training

- I have learnt how to let go and allow others to lead

- broadened my range of management styles

Change will take you on a journey that will see you arrive at places you hadn't planned. You will develop new skills, discover skills you didn't know you had, become completely frustrated and develop a deeper knowledge of communication systems. You will learn when to model change and lead it, and when to empower others to take control. Change will keep work interesting and learning fun. Change is a fabulous invention.

Changing practice to incorporate a preferred learning styles approach

Lisa Mead, education and training manager, Apples & Snakes

Introduction

Apples & Snakes is England's leading organisation for performance poetry. We exist to stretch the boundaries of poetry in education and performance, give voice to challenging and diverse artists and encourage the appreciation of poetry by all. Our artists cover the broadest spectrum of spoken word, from rap to storytelling to dub poetry, and we employ over 40 practitioners on a regular basis to deliver our work.

As an organisation we are at the beginning of our thinking about preferred learning styles and what this may mean for the educational practice of our practitioners. This report has been informed by a discussion with five practitioners who worked on a project that took place as part of the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme. The practitioners were Roger Robinson, Rosemary Harris, Steve Tasane, Joseph Coelho and BREIS, and Monika Neall from the Apples & Snakes education team was also present.

What became apparent from our discussions was that discussion around preferred learning styles sits inside a much wider debate about how learning is approached in school. We need to find the overlap between what we do as creative practitioners and what teachers have to deliver in school. From our discussions the following three questions seemed fundamental:

How can we create the conditions that encourage children to want to learn?

How do we explore the tension between creative process and measurable product?

How do we prepare the ground for creative practitioners and teachers to work together within the context of learning styles?

Creating the conditions

In their practice as educators, our artists seem to work instinctively in ways that create an environment in which the students want to learn and as a consequence, achieve. From observation of sessions and feedback from teachers across our education programme the following characteristics have been identified in successful workshops.

It was fun
BREIS says: 'Attitudes to learning are key. Learning is programmed in young people's heads as being not fun. It's a negative thing. When I am introduced as a rapper, they don't equate that with learning. It's all about making learning fun.'

The fear was taken out of writing
Writing in schools often loses the sense of being a creative process; lots of young people dislike or fear writing within the classroom. Our artists adopt techniques to counteract this. Roger described one of his techniques, 'I tell them that my job is to make it easier for them. If you stop worrying about grammar you get better ideas, and then you can address grammar within the editing process.' Joseph commented, 'talking about writing lyrics or raps is cool instead of using the word poetry.'

Relating to preferred learning styles

In our discussions about preferred learning styles it struck me that we were really talking about effective creative teaching; an ability for the person leading the session to have different approaches which engage each learner throughout the session. Our artists felt that the ideology of preferred learning styles was something that they were already thinking about and applying within their work. Roger commented, 'I always try to use different approaches in workshops, using visuals, for example. Poetry deals with images and metaphors. I make the link between visual images and writing.'

When analysing what preferred learning styles theory means to our work it seemed to make more sense to talk about 'preferred teaching styles'; it is impossible to divorce one from the other. BREIS asked 'Is preferred learning styles about empowering the kids or is it about teaching? It seems to me that it's about teaching them how to learn differently.'

We had all worked on a project in a challenging school that focused on students thinking about their learning styles. The year 7 students had been divided into their learning style group without fully understanding what this meant. In some cases this partial knowledge was counterproductive, with students saying things like 'I've got to move around. I'm kinaesthetic.' They didn't understand what preferring to learn in a kinaesthetic way really meant. This left us uncertain as to how useful it is for students to be told what their learning preference is. It seems to make more sense for teachers and creative partners to understand that people learn in different ways and use this to inform their practice. BREIS, again, commented, 'preferred learning styles is really about opening windows into learning.'

There was a flexible and open-ended approach
In essence this is what underlies preferred learning styles; thinking about different ways to engage with learning. Being flexible, 'having lots of tricks up your sleeve' as one artist put it, ensures that you can meet everyone's needs within a session. Steve talked about his approach; 'plan very carefully, and then be prepared to abandon everything and go with the flow. I try to learn from the class reaction. What's right for one group can be a disaster for another.'

Working from the students' experience
The creative partner's focus on moving students from the known to the unknown and giving students ownership over what they want to express. Students with a kinaesthetic learning preference often find it easier to produce written work based on lived experience.

Having a 'can do' attitude
The current education system's emphasis on assessment can lead to students focussing on what they can't do. Creative practitioners have high expectations and a belief that everyone can achieve. Within this there is also the implicit understanding that making mistakes helps with the learning process and is essential for creativity.

Self-assessment
Creative partners encourage students in workshops to look at their work and improve it; mimicking the drafting and editing process that partners undertake themselves. When students perform their work in sessions they can often hear mistakes and will go back and correct them.

Equality between creative partner and student
The role taken by the creative partner is that of a facilitator (rather than an expert) who can empower and encourage the learner. Paul describes this relationship; 'you are seen as poets not people teaching them poetry.' This is the vital ingredient, it seems to me, in what makes creative practitioners working in education different to teachers. The curriculum's primary focus is on the acquisition of knowledge, whereas creative practitioners are interested in creative expression, enabling them to be freer to explore and experiment within the work they do.

In our discussion, very little was mentioned about planning, learning objectives and assessment. I don't believe, however, that this is because creative partners don't plan; in fact in order to be involved in something creative, you need structure. The discussion and feedback did highlight a difference in approach, with our artists focussing on the process of writing and the education system often requiring a tangible outcome.

Process versus product
This tension is not new, but it seems that today's culture of education is even more focussed on outcomes rather than creating a desire to learn, which for me is fundamental within the preferred learning styles approach. Roger describes the tension; 'poets and teachers often want different outcomes. Poets want students to play with words and teachers want a poem.'

The irony, of course, is that by focussing on the process you will inevitably create a product. The tension then lies in the fact that the creative process is open ended so it may be difficult to say what that outcome will be and it might be unexpected and difficult to assess. With learning styles on the education agenda, it is possible to place greater emphasis on the process of learning and perhaps less on the end result.

Preparing the ground

Creative practitioners may well be addressing learning styles in their sessions and teachers may give good feedback about the work. We are still working in a culture, however, of students looking for the 'right' answer; teachers under huge pressures to achieve results; and where certain subjects and abilities are more highly valued than others.

So what can Apples & Snakes do?

I feel that we have a real opportunity to look at our practice and work with teachers to develop new approaches to teaching and learning particularly within English and literacy. We are also interested in how we develop the use of spoken word across the curriculum, how can poetry be used in science or maths?

The preferred learning styles agenda could signify a huge change in the way that teaching and learning are viewed in school. How can we, as creative practitioners, maximise the potential that this emphasis on learning styles offers? What might a greater knowledge of learning styles look like in the sessions that Apples & Snakes' artists deliver? And most importantly, how can we work with teachers to make this change? There are some very simple actions that we can take:

1 Currently our contracts with schools state that a teacher must be present in a workshop in order to deal with discipline. We will change this to say that the teacher is required for discipline but also to be part of the creative process.

2 Expand our library for creative practitioners to include books about learning (including preferred learning styles) and create a list of books that we can disseminate to all our practitioners.

3 Create a best practice guide and a planning sheet for poetry education that help artists to think about how activities connect with different learners.

In the longer term, we need to be looking at ways in which creative partners and teachers can work together to create conditions for learning. Apples & Snakes is interested in exploring preferred learning styles with our artists with the aim of developing a practical training programme for creative practitioners and teachers, which could address the following:

• What are preferred learning styles? How can preferred learning styles theory inform good practice within the classroom?

• Simple tips to ensure that the needs of all learners are being met in the classroom.

• Opportunities to shadow other practitioners.

• Time for artists and teachers to plan together to explore new approaches to teaching English and support each other's work.

Whilst the ideology behind preferred learning styles is nothing new and some creative practitioners are already thinking about how this influences their work, the same cannot be said for all the artists we work with. Apples & Snakes is committed to delivering high quality education work within schools. By implementing the ideas above, we feel confident that we can improve our practice, enable artists to think about how people learn, and build stronger partnerships between creative practitioners and educators.

Connecting preferred learning styles and multiple intelligences theory – a conversation with Nathalie Allexant and Nick Cannon

In addition to being involved in the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity action research programme, in summer 2004 Nick Cannon, deputy headteacher at Jubilee Primary School in Hackney, and Nathalie Allexant, primary drama advanced skills teacher at Gallions Primary School in Newham, had the opportunity to visit Project Zero[1], at Harvard University, a trip organised and funded by Creative Partnerships National Office through the Department for Education and Skills. The following piece is a transcript of a discussion about these experiences with Nathalie and Nick. The discussion was facilitated by Derek Brown and Paul Howard, the consultants working on the action research programme.

What motivated you to visit Project Zero?

Nick: Since attending a course on multiple intelligences five years ago, I have been trying to develop my practice along those lines. When the Project Zero opportunity came up, my headteacher was supportive of my going and arranged to come too. She is enthusiastic about developing our practice and is supporting a visit by two more colleagues this year. Three other colleagues have completed on-line courses with Project Zero.

What was the hook for the headteacher to make that level of commitment?

Nick: She rightly saw that the focus of Project Zero was not a million miles from where we were already trying to go as a school, so this was an opportunity to fine tune or build on existing practice. We were aware of the difference that it could make to children, we already believed in the theory and now we could start to put it into practice.

How would you judge the success of the trip to Project Zero?

Nathalie: At a personal level, it reaffirmed that I am in the best job in the world. It gave me a fresh perspective on that job, strengthened my love of teaching and learning and encouraged me to reflect on my values. As the new school year approached I had many fresh ideas and felt energised to be more experimental, to take more risks. The experience left me reflecting constructively on the type of teacher I wanted to be.

Nick: It was similar for me, a lot of affirmation. I have never been comfortable with the literacy and numeracy hours and I had contemplated giving up teaching. The success of the trip to Project Zero brought new frustrations however; I had so many ideas, ideas that needed

1 Founded in 1967, Project Zero's mission is to understand and enhance learning, thinking and creativity in the arts, as well as humanistic scientific disciplines, at individual and institutional levels.

to be shared with colleagues, but because I was stuck in my classroom I was unable to disseminate the learning from the visit. Fortunately, my headteacher saw the potential benefit of the role I could play in facilitating the progress of the school's planning and teaching. In due course, she freed me up to play a significant developmental role with colleagues.

Nathalie: Surprisingly, I felt a little depressed when the new term started. I was with a new class, an age group that I had not taught before. I had so many things that I wanted to try and felt a bit of a failure because I struggled to convert all the ideas into practical steps with an unfamiliar group. At this time, a lot of the momentum for change was directed at improving marking and assessment, as these were highlighted by the recent inspection of the school. It felt as if work on multiple intelligences was slipping from the agenda.

Nick: We've compared experiences and it is clear that we both wanted to change too much at once. As classroom practitioners we welcomed the chance to model our practice with our own groups, to invite colleagues in to see the developmental work in progress. It would have been easier to do this had I still got my old class, as I had an established working relationship with them.

It sounds as if your experience confirms that relationships are at the heart of the teaching and learning dynamic?

Nick: Yes. As I built up the relationship with the new group, multiple intelligences practice came more and more to the fore. Gradually it seeped out, into the corridor, into staff room conversation. There was increasing interest in the way I was working, and the results I was getting. Colleagues started to ask serious questions about what I was doing and about what they were doing themselves.

Can you try to break down the experience at Project Zero, to identify what made it so exciting?

Nathalie: We were allocated to study groups and by the end of the week there was a real sense of mutual support and understanding within what had started as a very diverse and disparate group. I experienced a sense of empowerment from the group and a sense of fun from the learning that we did together.

Nick: The whole experience was about understanding rather than knowledge. You know that understanding is the key to learning, but things become unstuck around Standard Attainment Tests and the like. In specific terms, the emphasis on questioning and the types of questioning techniques being modelled floored me… in a positive way.

Nathalie: Project Zero is big, but, instead of doing everything, we were encouraged to focus on the central issues and themes in some depth. All too often we try to do everything; here we experienced what it is like to concentrate on a small part of the whole picture and then bring other perspectives in and make connections.

It sounds as if the reshaping and re-ordering of knowledge was a key part of the process and that there are particular questioning strategies that are more likely to stimulate understanding. Could you illustrate this further?

Nick: When I came back, we were doing a project on Africa, based on the story 'The Masai and Me'. The project included a number of ways of looking comparatively at life in Kenya and the UK and culminated in a written piece. Regardless of how much or little the pupils had written, they were all asked to write what they thought they had learned. The responses to the question 'why did we look at the Masai?' were diverse, ranging from 'you told us to do it!', through 'to find out something about life in other countries' to 'by learning about other people I will know myself a lot better'! This specific example prompted me to think further about why I am teaching things in a particular way and where that teaching (and learning) is going.

Nathalie: If you allow yourself to be tied to the learning objectives of the National Curriculum, this degree of reflective practice is unlikely to happen. For me, it became clearer than before that questions of a particular type and quality held the key to the empowerment of children as independent learners.

To what extent have you found preferred learning styles to be an important element and how does it relate to multiple intelligences

Nick: There is an overlap between preferred learning styles (the way we receive learning) and multiple intelligences (the operational sense we make of it) and the area of overlap can be described as the quest for learning. Naturally, the components of that quest are questions… for understanding, exploring, seeing and thinking.

Nick: In my experience, once you are focusing on multiple intelligences, you are already focusing on preferred learning styles. Let me give you an example. We ran some workshops for staff on questioning techniques, using the Project Zero materials. It was noticeable that different people engaged with different styles of questioning and, through discussion, it became clear that their choices reflected fundamental learning preferences.

NC   The Project Zero materials identify five forms of question (narrative, experiential, fundamental, aesthetic and logical). These five forms create opportunities for children, who think differently from their teachers and other adults, to find their own way of relating and understanding.

Nathalie: And the key point is that the questions are open-ended. This helps people make connections.

Did you find that there were questions that you/the children were more comfortable with?

Nathalie: For me, it's narrative questioning. I read a great deal and narrative questioning suits me best.

Nick: For me too. A lot of children may lean towards narrative questioning too and this may be because that's the diet they become used to in school. The five strands of questioning from Project Zero open up other possibilities.

In what ways has your practice and colleagues' changed because of your engagement with multiple intelligences and preferred learning styles?

Nick: We have introduced a new planning sheet that focuses on what the teacher does in relation to preferred learning styles. As teachers, we tend to stick to our comfort zone, our own preferred teaching style. Staff are encouraged, no, required to accommodate visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning to some extent in all lessons. So, if they start with a strongly visual input, they cannot deliver their final plenary visually.

When I reflected on my own pattern of teaching, I realised that I was shutting off a third of my class, because I was not offering sufficient diversity of access. You have to be capable of self-criticism, in order to move your practice forward.

After a recent topic on the Victorians, children were asked to represent, in whatever format they wanted, what they had learned. One boy, recalling the dark and dingy dwellings, decided to make models of spiders. When I asked him why he had produced them without legs, he advised me that he could not use scissors. I was intrigued why he had chosen a medium that was so problematic for him. On reflection, he wished he had done a dance, rather than a model. Summing up the experience, he said: 'I've learned that I'm not good at making models. I am not strong in spatial learning…' I started to interrupt him, to reassure him, but he did not permit my interjection and continued 'but I think I should get credit for trying something that I knew I was not good at.'

To what extent is the critical framework you use based on the qualities of good teaching?

Nathalie: There has to be a shift away from good teaching to good learning. All too often teaching is couched in terms of delivery. I think we should try to avoid talking about delivering lessons, because this implies a performance and edging children out of the process. A focus on learning permits a much more active role for children, encourages them to explore. 'Learning journeys' is a useful term for describing this process.

Have you encountered any obstacles in your attempts to develop practice in your schools on the basis of preferred learning styles and multiple intelligences?

Nick: Some colleagues are anxious about the development. They say 'If I give them [the pupils] a choice of how to do work they'll just paint patterns or draw.' My response is that they might for a while – although some children will rarely opt for that way of working – but that they will go on to use that experience as a springboard for other types of learning and representation. That's what I found with my own class.

Nathalie: The support and impetus of the school's senior management team, especially the headteacher, are vital elements if change is to be effected and sustained.

One problem is that there is never enough time to share. For me, that's best done by staff looking at each other's practice. Somehow, Inset does not have the same effect.

Perhaps that is because training is often delivered on a 'one size fits all' basis that does not take account of teachers' preferred learning styles. For some, showing them your practice is the best way of getting the message across, others will access it best by being told or documentation, while a third group might benefit from the opportunity to have a go.

Nick: Even with exposure to preferred learning styles and multiple intelligences, we may struggle to lose the urge to impose our own values and perceptions on what children are doing.

Nathalie: I agree. I have been trying to shift my practice to take greater account of the learning needs of individual children, especially those with special educational needs or the most able. For the former, it is about opening up multiple avenues, so that they can find a route that takes them around their blockages to learning; for the latter, it's about creating more opportunities for open-ended enquiry and independent learning. In both cases, it's a question of taking into account diverse ways of learning.

At my school, we are tackling the problem of overloading children with knowledge by slimming down the curriculum. We want to focus on a greater depth of understanding, make more cross-curricular links, create more opportunities for team teaching.

Along the lines that Howard Gardner means when he talks about covering less and uncovering more?

Nathalie: Precisely

Tools

The development and evaluation of preferred learning styles assessments within the action research programme

Mary Huane, advanced skills teacher in drama at Islington Arts and Media School (until summer 2005)

During the first year of the programme, a traditional questionnaire format was used for the assessment of students' preferred learning styles. The assessment tool comprised 18 statements, to which pupils were asked to respond with 'Yes' (applicable to them) and 'No' (not applicable). Of the 18 statements, six each related to visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning.

Although the assessments produced a range of useful data, evaluations undertaken within the programme schools and by the consultants indicated the need for a number of modifications:

- the appearance of the assessment tool as a test may have led some students to anticipate what their teachers wanted them to put

- increasing the number of statements might provide a greater range of variation and accuracy in the results

- the format might not have been sufficiently accessible to the wide age range of students in the programme schools

- the process of completing the assessments did not take different learning styles into account

- some pupils with literacy difficulties may have found the questionnaire too challenging, even when given assistance with the reading

- the implementation of the assessments may not have been consistent across classes and schools

As a result of these observations, a new format was introduced during the second year of the programme. The main changes were:

- increasing the number of statements from 18 to 36

- printing the statements on stickers, that students had to peel off and stick on a sheet as applicable

- producing more detailed guidance notes for the conduct of the assessments

These materials have been successfully used with students (from year 2 to year 11) and staff, and have been translated into a number of community languages by colleagues at Islington Arts & Media School.

Guidance notes for the assessment

The purpose of the assessment is to help students to become more aware of how they learn and how they can help themselves to learn more effectively through this awareness.

Give students a pack comprising:

- Two A4 sheets of stickers
- One A3 sheet with a picture of a brain on it
- One A3 sheet with a picture of a bin on in

These can be found in the back of this resource, and are also available to download from the Creative Partnerships website. You should use a photocopier to enlarge the Brain and Bin sheets to A3. There are two versions of the stickers, available in a standard Avery L7160 format. One version uses ear, hand and eye symbols to indicate visual, auditory or kinaesthetic preference. The other uses coloured circles and can be used as an alternative if students become too familiar with the meaning of the symbols.

Instruct students to stick their name sticker onto the brain sheet and write their name on it, and stick their tutor group sticker onto the brain sheet and write their tutor group on it.

Read each statement to the class. Students must decide if the statement applies to them. If it does they stick it on the brain sheet, if not they stick it on the bin sheet. They must only do the statements at the speed set by the teacher, and should not discuss them with their friends.

When all stickers have been completed, students need to count how many eyes, ears or hands they have on the brain sheet, and write the totals on the appropriate sticker.

You should then ask each student for their visual (eyes), auditory (ears) and kinaesthetic (hands) totals. This data could be entered on to each student's record.

Explain to the students what each symbol means:

- ear is someone who has an auditory preference for learning
- hand is someone who has a kinaesthetic preference for learning
- eye is someone who has a visual preference for learning

How to use the assessment data

Tell the students this is only a rough guide, and it is possible for people to learn using more than one style and that styles can change.

Go through the top tips to help you study (found on page 63) with the students, and explain some of the tips may only be appropriate to use at home.

Begin a discussion with students on how knowing how they learn can change the way they work in class. Display the brain sheets in the students' form room, if possible, as a point of reference for students and to keep them aware of learning styles. Include in this display the top tips to help you study sheets.

Each student will have three scores, for their visual, auditory and kinaesthetic statements. As students were given the option of putting statements in the bin, it is likely that the totals of these scores will all be different. For example, in the table below student A put 20 statements in the bin, but student B only put five in the bin. The numbers have no value in the scoring system, they just show a student's preference.

Example of assessment scores

Student	Visual	Auditory	Kinaesthetic
A	5	6	5
B	10	11	10
C	11	3	7
D	3	11	7

Students A and B have the same learning style preferences. A higher selection of statements (student B) across does not mean they have a greater personal preference than the student with lower statement selection (student A). The relationships between the numbers for the individual are the key.

Student C has a more developed visual preference. For student D the exact opposite is true. However, we can also see that both students enjoy being actively engaged in activities to help them learn as both their kinaesthetic scores are quite high.

This data can help you and the student to make decisions about the approach they take to learning, and to understand how they can best revise and reinforce their knowledge.

Do bear in mind that people can develop their weaker learning styles and use their stronger learning styles to support them further.

Ideas to support visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners

Developed by Nathalie Allexant, primary drama advanced skills teacher, Gallions Primary School, Newham

Visual

Use lots of visual prompts like pictures, posters, maps, cartoons, photographs and cue cards to support key concepts or words.

Create a visual reminder of the day's activities and display on the whiteboard.

Use lots of different graphic organisers.

Display positive messages around the classroom, with associated pictures and photographs.

Children can make posters of their understanding in class, and for homework.

Place key words around the room, and on flash cards on the tables.

Highlight key words in the learning objective in different colours.

Use visual prompts, costumes, and props for story writing, and to bring stories to life through storytelling.

Build visual descriptions about characters and ask children to create these characters using art materials.

Create group story maps which illustrate the sequence of a story.

Ask questions using visual recall and visual imagination; 'what did it look like? what would it look like?'

Make visual associations when recalling information.

Encourage spelling by asking the children to visualise the words, and then to break it down into different parts.

Encourage children to see the spelling in upper left field of vision with their eyes closed.

Teach and model visualisations.

Use and display class, group and individual memory maps.

Give children plenty of access to different coloured pens, paper, and whiteboards.

Regularly change the display table, so that children can access many different objects to support their project work.

Children can mark their own and other's work with different coloured pens, with each pen representing a different skill (e.g. verbs, adverbs etc).

Auditory

Monitor the sound level in the classroom, and decide, with the children, the appropriate noise level for the activity – make a 'decibel clock'.

Teach and model good listening, and play lots of listening games.

Display rules of good listening alongside a picture of children doing 'good listening'.

Play background music suitable to the activity or mood in the classroom.

Increase use of positive talk in the classroom and frequently use your voice to flag up key words.

Increase the amount of language activities based on key words or objectives for the week.

Have children talk through their memory maps and explain them to others.

Encourage children to talk with their partner about their idea before writing it down.

Use lots of singing, chanting, rapping and narrative poetry. Sing or rap times tables.

Use different voices for different characters when reading a story.

Give auditory references like, 'it sounded like…' and try to find auditory associations.

Use paired prediction before investigating or reading something, and encourage the children to say, 'and my evidence for this is…'

Encourage spelling by sounding the word out, using phonics, and breaking it down into syllables.

Use lots of different groupings for talk.

Have a listening centre in the classroom with books on tape or CDs, and a tape recorder.

Spend more time individually with these children and explain things in more detail.

Kinaesthetic

Build into each lesson a time for a brain break (Brain Gym) – a quick physical activity or a quiet time for relaxation or reflection.

Frequently move the children around the classroom for different activities; establish zones in the classroom for different subject areas.

Have a space in the classroom which is your Get up and Go area – free from tables and chairs.

Increase your use of open body language.

Before handwriting, get children to draw the letters in the air, on each other's backs, on palms of hands or even dance them.

Increase your use of drama, dance and PE.

Increase opportunities for learning through playful exploration, and through manipulating objects.

Use laminated letters and words constructing sentences and key words. Increase the use of jigsaws and games.

Use lots of toys and props to enhance story writing and telling.

Use kinaesthetic references when you give examples or tell stories, like 'it felt…'

Use lots of physical associations like mime, action and gesture – useful when learning punctuation.

When doing visualisations increase the use of descriptions of physical feelings.

Allow children to doodle and fiddle as long as they are not disrupting others.

Help children remember information by using shapes, colours and spaces. The children can then trace over these to help them with recall.

On the children's memory maps, ask them to walk through their ideas, using the whole room.

Use roleplay wherever possible as a quick Get up and Go activity.

Ask children to use their bodies to represent ideas or to symbolise a word or concept.

Ask children to pretend to be the people you are learning about; walk like them, talk like them and imagine their feelings.

Top tips to help you study

Developed by Mary Huane, advanced skills teacher in drama at Islington Arts and Media School (until summer 2005)

If you are a kinaesthetic learner…

To memorise information, pace or walk around while reciting to yourself, or using flashcards or notes.

If you need to fidget, try doing so in a way that will not disturb others or endanger yourself or others. Try jigging your legs or feet, use hand or finger exercises, or handle a tennis ball.

You might not study best at a desk. Try lying on your stomach or back. Try studying while sitting in a comfortable chair or on cushions or a beanbag.

Studying with music in the background might help you.

Use coloured construction paper to cover your desk, your exercise books or decorate your study area. Choose your favourite colour, as this will help you focus. This technique is called colour grounding.

While studying take frequent breaks, but be sure to settle back down to work quickly. A reasonable time schedule would be 15-25 minutes of study time, then 3-5 minutes of break time.

When trying to memorise information, try closing your eyes and writing the information in the air or on a surface with your finger. Try to picture the words on your head as you are doing this. Try to hear words in your head too.

Later, when you try to remember this information, close your eyes and try to see it with your mind's eye and to hear it in your head.

If you are a visual learner…

Write things down that you want to remember; this will help you to remember them better.

Look at the person who is speaking, this will help you to focus.

Try and work in a quiet place, if necessary wear earmuffs or earplugs.

You may like to listen to soft music while you are working.

If you miss something a teacher says, or you don't quite understand it, ask them politely to repeat it.

Often you will learn best alone.

When researching or revising, take lots of notes and write down lots of detail.

Use colour to highlights main ideas in texts.

When trying to learn material for a test by writing out notes, cover your notes and then rewrite. Re-writing will help you to remember.

Before starting a task, set yourself a goal to achieve and write it down, place it in front of you and read it as you do your task.

Before reading a chapter of a book, preview it first by scanning the pictures, headings and so forth.

Try to sit yourself away from the window and the door and close to the front of the class.

Whenever you can make use of charts, maps, posters, films, videos, and computer software to study from and present your work.

If you are an auditory learner…

Study with a friend so that you can talk about the information and hear it too.

Recite out loud the information you want to remember several times.

Make your own recordings of important points you want to remember and listen to it repeatedly. This is especially useful when learning material for tests.

When reading, skim through and look at the pictures, chapter titles and other clues, then say out loud what you think this book could be about.

Make flashcards for material you want to learn and use them repeatedly, reading them out loud. Use different colours to aid your memory.

Read out loud when possible.
You need to hear the words as you read them to understand them well.

When doing maths calculations, use grid paper to help you set your sums out correctly and in their correct columns.

Use different colours and pictures in your notes, exercise books, and anywhere you record information. This will help you remember it.

Biographies

Derek Brown

Derek is the managing director of Actorshop Ltd, which he founded in 1985 when working as the drama advisor and head of the advisory drama service for the London Borough of Newham.

He has created and managed several large events and programmes including seven international festivals of theatre-in-education, three London young playwrights' festivals, and a conference for six London boroughs at the Millennium Dome, focusing on creativity and preferred learning styles. He initiated the A+ (Arts Plus) Programme in London in partnership with Jon Harris, director of Stratford Circus, after researching a variety of programmes in Britain and America.

Derek is also associate director for 'l8r' a health education series, broadcast by the BBC, which was voted one of the most creative children's programmes for 2006 by Broadcast Magazine, won the RTS Education Award and was nominated for a BAFTA and the prestigious Japan Award. For more information go to www.actorshop.biz

Paul Howard

Paul has over 30 years' experience in education, having been a youth worker, teacher, lecturer, headteacher and since 1999 an education and training consultant. For the last seven years he has worked on a freelance basis and as one of the founding partners in Dreyfus Training & Development, a training and consultancy company specialising in social inclusion issues.

Throughout his career, Paul has had a particular interest in the education in mainstream schools of children and young people who have been deemed as having emotional and behavioural difficulties. Paul's long-standing commitment to inclusive education – for 11 years he was headteacher of the London Borough of Newham's Behaviour Support Service – has led him to explore alternatives to traditional constructs of educational failure and learning difficulties. In this context, much of his work has focused on preferred learning styles, the creative curriculum and the relational aspects of behaviour including restorative justice.

Paul has delivered training throughout the UK, as well as in America and the Czech Republic and is the author or co-author of a wide range of material.

Hannah Wilmot

Hannah has worked as a freelance consultant for 13 years having previously worked for Battersea Arts Centre, Riverside Studios and London Arts Board (now Arts Council England, London) as Education Officer. Hannah specialises in the evaluation of education programmes, particularly those involving the arts and creativity. She also has considerable experience of designing and providing training for artists and teachers wishing to pursue creative partnerships.

Schools and creative partners that participated in the Preferred Learning Styles and Creativity Action Research Project

First year, September 2003 to July 2004

Bow School, Tower Hamlets

Gallions Primary School, Newham

Islington Arts and Media School, Islington

Stormont House School, Hackney

Second year, September 2004 to July 2005

Bow School, Tower Hamlets

Central Foundation Girls' School, Tower Hamlets

Daniel House Pupil Referral Unit, Hackney

Gallions Primary School, Newham

Islington Arts and Media School, Islington

Islington Green School, Islington

Jubilee Primary School, Hackney

Lauriston Primary School, Hackney

Robert Blair Primary School, Islington

Stormont House School, Hackney

Creative partners

Chris Tripp

Dionne Braham

Hannah Joyce

Jago Brown

Roberto Lagnado

Vicky Cave

Almeida Theatre, www.almeida.co.uk

Apples & Snakes, www.applesandsnakes.org

Bow Arts Trust, www.bowarts.org

Eelyn Lee Productions, www.eelynlee.com

Free Form, www.freeform.org.uk

Guildhall School of Music and Drama CONNECT, www.gsmd.ac.uk/connect

Hands on Inventions

The Photographers' Gallery, www.photonet.org.uk

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Creative Partnerships is a programme managed by Arts Council England, the national development agency for the arts in England. It gives young people in 36 disadvantaged areas across England the opportunity to develop their creativity and their ambition by building partnerships between schools and creative organisations, businesses and individuals. Creative Partnerships aims to demonstrate the pivotal role creativity can play in transforming education in every curriculum subject for children of all ages and abilities.

London East and London South were established as two of the first sixteen Creative Partnerships areas in 2002, delivering programmes with schools in Hackney, Islington, Newham and Tower Hamlets and Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark over a four year period.

In April 2006 the two areas merged to form one Creative Partnerships area delivering a joint creative programme in eight boroughs. **Creative Partnerships London East and South** is based at Discover in Stratford.