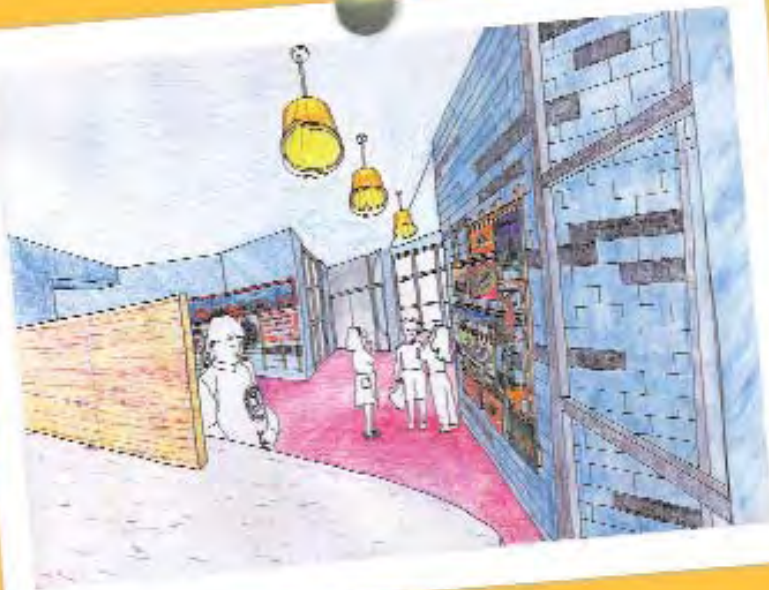


Visual learning in the community school

With an eye on design: the power of presentation

Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf



The series *Visual learning in the community school* tells some of the many stories of partnerships that have increased school children's access to creative learning opportunities in 2003 and 2004. Oral language, visual literacies and strategic thinking were the focus of the research on which this series of booklets is based. The on-going study results from the collaboration of Creative Partnerships and scholars Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf, supported through Stanford University and Brown University.

Visual learning in the community school With an eye on design: the power of presentation

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Visual learning in the community school

Includes five booklets in slipcase:

- *Art is all about looking: drawing and detail*
- *Hoping for accidents: media and technique*
- *With an eye on design: the power of presentation*
- *It looks to me as if: talking about picture books*
- *Sharing a common vision: community learning for
community futures*

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Visual learning in the community school narrates one year (2003-2004) in which several types of creative bridging and partnering took place within Hythe Community School in Hythe, Kent. Behind these links were the inspiration and support of Creative Partnerships. Central roles in this tale are played by visual artist Roy Smith and architectural designer Ben Kelly. As resident artist, Roy Smith spent one day a week at Hythe Community School during the academic year. Ben Kelly and members of his design team worked together with the children to design the reception area of the new school building. But this narrative is also decidedly shaped by the play, faith, humour, curiosity, and tenacity of many more characters. The children take on new roles beyond that of pupil as they enact, remember, and promote their triumphs and set-backs. They do so in the company of teachers, parents, administrators, and community supporters, who delight in asking questions rather than giving answers. The storytellers are Shelby Wolf and Shirley Brice Heath who added their questions in order to capture, count, and recount the language and thinking behind creative work and play. Here the two researchers tell of the shifts in language and ways of thinking that lie behind the sustained power of creative learning that holds out new roles for all partners. Each of the five booklets within *Visual learning in the community school* takes readers behind the relationships, risks, and probabilities of the many adventures possible in *Learning for Creative Futures*.



Picture this: A child's plastic sand bucket. Where is it? On a beach, perhaps filled with sand with its matching shovel lying beside it? Or do you see it turned upside down, its solidly wet contents forming yet another part of a sand castle? If your beach is along the English Channel, perhaps the bucket serves as a container for the many speckled rocks that make up the shoreline. Can you see it packed into the car with all the other gritty toys at the end of the day? Or is it forgotten on the beach, about to take off on the next tide? And what colour is it? Some primary colour, no doubt. Perhaps blue to match the colour of the water, or even yellow to stand out from a distance, so that the child it belongs to can remember and run down the beach to retrieve it before it sails out to sea.

A child's beach bucket is typically round in its design. It is made of plastic that's hard to break, and it has a sturdy handle for lugging all manner of things—sand, shells, rocks, toys, and even slippery fish swimming in a scooped up splash

of water. While it is no doubt a pretty thing in the eyes of a child, we more often think about a child's beach bucket in terms of function rather than aesthetics. It can carry things. It can mould shapes that will, in combination, create castles, forts, and mountains through which imagined characters chase one another.

But now try to visualise another picture. Imagine you are entering the reception area of Hythe Community School, where buckets hang upside down from the ceiling and serve as light fixtures. Their yellow plastic provides a warm glow, so much more welcoming than the glare of the typical florescent lighting in schools. To see these buckets high in the air over our heads is to see an object that we thought we knew so well, but now we see in an entirely new way. Such is the purpose of innovative design. A traditionalist might suggest, "When we look at a work of art, we should not attend to what it represents but to how it presents" (Eaton, 1988, p. 79). Yet designer Ben Kelly, who came with

“To design is to communicate.”

colleagues Patrick McKinney and Michael Westthorp to help shape the interior design of Hythe Community School's new reception area, believes “To design is to communicate” (cited in McDermott, 1990), and that communication is most innovative when representation and presentation go hand in hand.

Design opens or closes the world before us. We hope, indeed expect, that good design lies behind every tool, piece of furniture, bucket, and building upon which we depend. Through design, we gain a visual perspective or a sense of involvement, beauty, or heightened memory. With design, we not only go elsewhere through a feeling of familiarity, but we also enter ever more deeply into

ourselves. We almost always speak of art as being in the design. Space acts on us by design.

In this booklet, we share some stories of how Hythe Community School took to heart the capacity of design in all its prepositional powers—before, behind, through, with, and in the art of children and that of the school. We will begin with Ben Kelly and the Hythe children's initial ideas for the school's new reception area and continue through to the completion of the building with its innovative display case for the children's art. In addition, we will describe the collaboration in learning among teachers, artists, and children as they showcase their work. As Headteacher Carolyn Chivers put it: “Taking care with display shows children we value their work.”



Designs of quality

Where it all began is something of an origin tale. Having a new building go up right next door to the older building of their school provided the children of Hythe Community School many points of illustration in lessons for more than a year. Throughout the construction process from 2002 well into 2004, Hythe teachers and administrators sought to involve their children in multiple ways. From start to finish, the children knew what was happening with the construction process and what was going to happen, especially how these events and the design behind them would affect their own lives, as well as those of younger brothers and sisters and friends who would someday come to this school.

To be sure, a great hole appearing in the ground after the noisy push and pull, dig and dump work of many large pieces of equipment dramatically announced the beginning of the building. But the children knew that one of the best

parts of what was to come would involve them very directly. When they saw drawings and a model of what the building would look like, they were most interested in the reception area, particularly how it would make those who entered feel and see just what their school was about.

The children began to think, almost before the bulldozers began their noisy messy work, about how children, parents, and visitors might enter this reception area, what they might see there, and how this beginning would open up and reveal the life of the rest of the building. The children thought about how they wanted to be able to see what went on from one internal space to another, how colour should declare the excitement and fun of their work, and how a special place to display their artwork would establish something to talk about among students and visitors. They thought about the comfort of their guests and decided an elaborate drinks

machine would be a must. And they knew that the chairs should be cozy and just right for children, including a place to put their sweets. Thus, the children could see that their own ideas for the reception area went beyond the big hole dug by monstrous machines. Their ideas were the real beginning—the true opening—of the new school building.

Ben Kelly Design first came to Hythe in the spring of 2003 sponsored by The Sorrell Foundation and its innovative creation *joinedupdesignforschools*. This project brings UK designers together with groups of children in schools to explore “how good design can improve the quality of life in schools by listening to the voices of the consumers. It inspires pupils by putting them in the driving seat, giving them control and responsibility as clients.” Crucial within this initiative is the leveraging of the knowledge, skills and commitment of the UK design industry for the engagement of young learners in

what it means to enter a client-consultant relationship. Ben’s new clients at Hythe Community School ranged in age from two to seven, “making them the youngest in the programme “ (The Sorrell Foundation, 2003, p. 30).

Within such a link, roles, rules, and risks differ from those of the usual everyday life of students and designers. Together in this new kind of bond, they draw upon their language for communication to convey uses of space, colour, and form. They also tap the range of media that make the everyday life of work go forward outside of schools: models, sketches, sampling for comparative analysis, and in-depth portrayals of segments of the whole, as well as infrastructural supports.

As the children and Ben worked to create the opening space of the school as one of welcome, they combined the children’s models with the Ben Kelly Design team’s original sketches, their samples of materials and colours, and their detailed representations of bits of

Their ideas were the real beginning —the true opening...



the reception area, such as the light fixtures made with children's yellow sand buckets in mind. For the team at Ben Kelly Design, the most important idea is that interior design needs to be a "breath of fresh air [and] not a recycling of stale ideas" (Myerson, 2000). Ben's view of interior design met the spirit of the children: both saw this as an opportunity to breathe new life into spaces that often received little attention.

The first meetings of Ben and his team with the selected design committee of Hythe Community School students left no doubt that a new vision of client had to be taken into account. Early Years Manager Nicky Hill explained:

When Ben first came, he had this huge portfolio, and he's used

to having, you know, very important clients with lots of money. But the children were unimpressed with that. They wanted to get close up to his designs. One child climbed on the table. Indeed, there were children crawling all over. They wanted to touch it. But he was fine after that. You know, he's been through a real learning curve. So have we!

In selecting the design team, Hythe chose a group of children who represented the entire school, including its special needs population. They also chose children who had a keen interest in how things work. For example, the teachers selected Max, a child they described as "buzzing, beeping, always busy." He was a "scientist, on the cusp between being genius and being absentminded," for he often demonstrated lapses of attention. Yet, for things he was interested in, Max could stay the course.

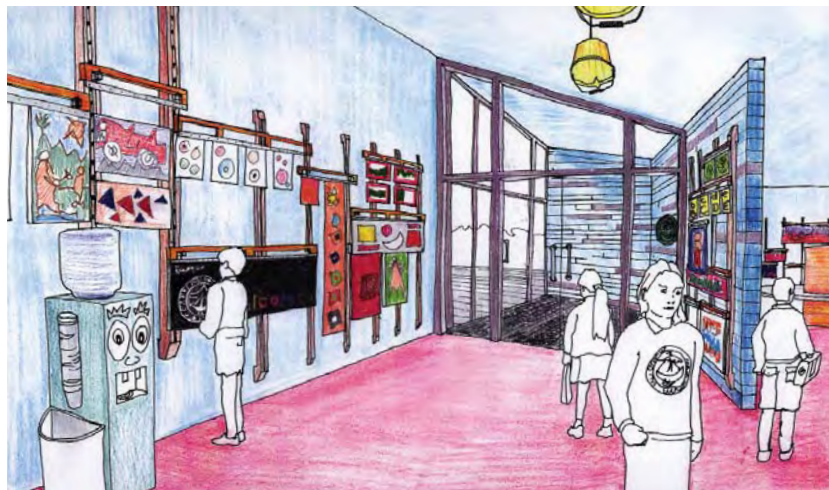
Ben Kelly's first day at the school brought the surprise that the



design committee children were more interested in his person than in any of his drawings and sketches on paper. They wanted to check him out before they engaged with his ideas, tools, and drawings. They knew art as highly personal, something to be talked about and built from, and they well understood that if they had a good sense of the designer himself, then the drawings and ideas would come. The children gathered around Ben, checking out his shoelaces, turn-ups, and every possible aspect of his appearance. They listened to what he said, but they also moved about Ben's tall,

thin frame to collect their combined sense of who he was and what he might mean as part of their future work together.

Before Ben left their first meeting, he gave the children the task of creating a brief that would demonstrate "the thinking behind how we welcome people to our school." The children decided to build their ideas in models that he could examine in their next meeting. At this point, the design team expanded to include the entire population of 185 pupils, and the project expanded to include almost every area of the



curriculum. The children read and studied books on design. They cut, pasted, and glued. They measured and talked about dimension. They studied patterns in fabric swatches and discussed colour. They researched their current reception area in the current school building and interviewed staff about the equipment they needed in their work. A Year Two crew of children worked together, borrowing a chair from the classroom and redecorating it in collage. Another group of children created a fabulous three-dimensional drinks machine. Max, fascinated that the school had an alarm system, constructed a new one equipped with multiple buzzers and bells, along with a sign that read: "Warning! Danger! This school is alarmed." Although they wanted visitors to feel welcome, they also knew that "SECURITY" was vital.

Then the children of the school, led by the design committee, mounted a huge exhibition in the hall with all their designs. A team from Ben Kelly Design along with a variety of people from Creative Partnerships

and local dignitaries as well as mums and dads came to see their creations. Carolyn said of the children's ideas to build models, "They couldn't talk it and they certainly couldn't write it, so they've made it." Now it was Ben's turn to examine the children's ideas, and it was clear that he was ready, for he toured the hall taking copious notes, accompanied by a videographer who captured the designs as well as many of the children's comments on tape. When the children gathered around a professional model of the new building built by Patrick McKinney, Ben and Patrick got on the floor with them, peering at the model from the children's perspective. They, in turn, decided that the model was "amazing" and "smashing." And they even joked about its size, for as one child mused, "I don't think that should be our school 'cause that is way too small for me!"

Ben laughed right along with the children, but he took their comments quite seriously. Based on their ideas, he questioned the

“We posed questions to them, and their response was this exhibition; that’s how they overcame the practical problems of communication.”

children on the integration of elements, colours, functions, and how shapes would fit within shapes. Of the experience, Ben later recounted: “We posed questions to them, and their response was this exhibition; that’s how they overcame the practical problems of communication. They communicated in the way that young children do best, by chucking a load of stuff out from within themselves: drawings, paintings, models, collages, written stuff, tons and tons of it—all over the walls! Their brief/exhibition was incredible. It had such vigour, life and enthusiasm. It was really stimulating. It was the key that unlocked the process” (The Sorrell Foundation, 2003, p. 30).

Not every adult was willing to listen so closely to children. Year Two teacher Sharon Lewis explained that Max’s alarm system was “really well made. But he was not going to let those big, important dignitaries walk away without his explanation. ‘I have not finished telling you!’” he cried when they

turned to go. Year Two teacher Claire McIlroy agreed: “He kept going and going. He was incredibly knowledgeable about the school’s security system!”

Communication throughout the give-and-take process drew not only on words, but also on the children’s familiarity with a range of art forms. They knew about sculpting, sketching, creating portraits, and building models as well as designing mobiles, and through this wide variety, they represented their ideas. As they worked to mount the exhibition, much discussion went on in their classrooms. Their teachers had reminded them as they represented their ideas: “You can draw, you can diagram, you can use the construction kit. You may want to use the computer. You might want to do a painting.” LEGO blocks, modelling, and an assortment of fabrics also got into the mix of media. In addition, all the forms of the children’s ideas and the pace of the work had purpose and time attached, for the timing was punctuated by the return visits



of the Ben Kelly Design team to meet with the design committee of students over the next several months.

The children decided they had to create questionnaires—to learn what people thought were the functions of the reception area. Then they compiled the results and reconciled findings with their own ideas. The children examined the meanings of certain unexpected words that popped up in their discussions: *stretch*, for example, drew their attention to the expansive dimensions of stretch and space that their nearby beach represented (stretching from Folkestone to Dover). But there was also stretch right within their own spaces in the ways the entries into their rooms stretched out from the doorway off the hall and curved windows and doorways stretched the eye to see beyond one room into the next.

Words such as *record*, *document*, *represent* flowed through the children's conversations about what they were doing with their

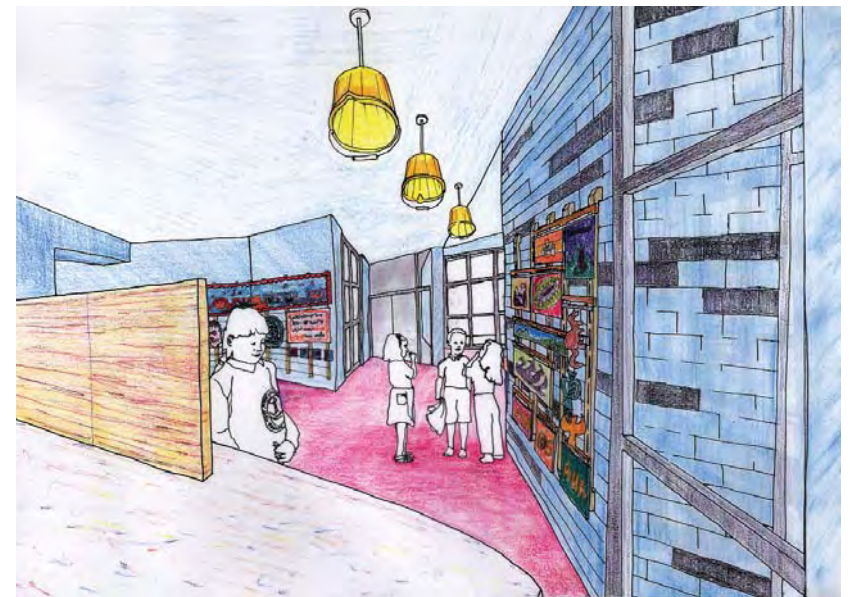
ideas. Throughout their work they compared all sorts of things (spaces, feelings within those spaces, functions, and users and considered how these might affect design). They took walks, studied maps, remembered direct visits to other places, and, of course, shared conversations over their different forms of representation on the way to building their exhibition for Ben.

Deadlines, decisions, and deals of negotiation and compromise drove the pace of the children's thinking and creating. Ben noted:

I think it's incredibly valuable that this process happens. That designers, yes, and architects listen to what children say—what they talk about—rather than it being completely prescriptive, as it mostly is that grownups go off and do something that they think the children want. And that may not necessarily be the case. And I think through the engagement, it actually does free everybody's minds up.

When Ben returned to Hythe for the exhibition, he recognized how much thinking the children had put into “how we welcome people to our school.” The children's design team saw the reception area as the absolute heart of the new building. There they would receive guests, invite visitors and family members into their school, and the space had to give everyone who entered all the prepositional values of design—of being within, seeing behind, and anticipating before them the creative learning life of

Hythe Community School. They decided that they did not want their reception area to be like many “adult places”—boring and just about “sitting.” Foremost in the children's ideas was their conviction that the reception area must move people around, and a gallery of their art would make this happen. Moreover, action had to be not only implied but also real. Ben said of the children's range of ideas and ways of justifying them, “It was the most fantastic thing I've ever seen.”





Playing for keeps

We could speculate on the reasons behind this assessment of the children's work from a leading UK designer. No doubt, there are many reasons bundled within Ben's capsule statement. But perhaps the children would say that they most impressed Ben with their sense of playfulness, and he joined in their joy. This is how the light fixtures in the reception area came to be sand buckets for the beach. Originally designed by furniture/product designer Michael Marriott, who is a good friend of Ben's, several of these lights hang in Ben's London office. He chose them for Hythe because of his conviction that "they were totally appropriate for the project."

Ben wanted the buckets to call the nearby beach to mind, and when you enter the reception area, images of play, open spaces, the sea, wind, possibilities, castles, and dreams do seem to appear in your head.

The children loved Ben's ideas (as

well as their own), and felt a strong sense of accomplishment as they collaborated with Ben. One boy, a seven-year-old client named Jack Somerville, said: "We learned to make things. My favourite was the bucket lights—they looked cool. When I walk into this reception area after it's built, I think I'll feel famous" (The Sorrell Foundation, 2003, p. 30).

Upon entering the reception area, the eye moves across colours, shapes, and unexpected combinations of these to create spaces for the display of completed art, engagement with an artist in residence, and opportunities to stop and simply take in all that the reception area offers. But once the visitor has taken in all this at eye level, the eye draws upward, and it is hard not to giggle at the collection of yellow plastic pails.

Perhaps more than anything else, these pails portray the essence of play that the children wanted to

“A display system is at the heart of what we’ve done for all their work in the reception area...”

convey to those who come to their school. They wanted to ensure all who entered there that the joyful and innovative aspects of play permeated the learning within the building. Of course, this area also had to be one of access, movement, and transition from the front door right on through the building, but each aspect must reflect these multiple possibilities. The children designed and provided rationale for bits and pieces that mattered most to them: the patterns of the fabric for the sofa, the flow of the floor tiles (to include a “path” further into the building), the rug colour (“Barbie Pink”), the spaces for sitting and walking, and most important, possibilities for how they might showcase their art.

Ben noted the design committee’s fundamental understanding of how the presentation of their art would provide the caption for their school: “A display system is at the heart of what we’ve done for all their work in the reception area, so there is a kind of formal way of presenting the children’s work from class.”

There is a subtlety in the final phrase of Ben’s “formal” purpose of the reception area: bringing out from within the classes the work (and the play!) of the children, filling this welcoming space with what the children were creating inside their classrooms.

For centuries, philosophers have told of the potential of space for enabling not only its own design, but also revealing the layers of openings and closings within us as individuals and as groups. Paul Tillich (1959) once wrote: “The power of space is great, and it is always active for creation and destruction. It is the basis of the desire of any group of human beings to have a place of their own, a place which gives them reality, presence, power of living, which feeds them, body and soul” (p. 16).

For the teachers at Hythe, the design project built on the established view of the school community, for children and their families see their school as “a place of their own” [see the booklet

Sharing a common vision in this series]. Along with other opportunities the Hythe teachers provided in bringing in creative partners to work and play with their children, the design project intensified the quality of “place” by bringing reality into the children’s roles as learners. As the children, for example, became clients working with Ben as their consultant, they brought their ideas, vocabulary, means of communication, and uses of evidence and reason into stronger focus. In this collaboration, their roles were very real. They had to take responsibility, and in doing so, they were playing out the best of what educators who work to bring the study of design into their schools hope will happen (Anning, 1994, 1997). Headteacher Carolyn Chivers, Early Years Manager Nicky Hill, and Year Two teacher Sharon Lewis explained:

Carolyn: I think it’s probably the richest curriculum that you can offer these very young children. Because actually every area of

the curriculum has been covered by just setting children a problem. Giving them a problem to solve.

Sharon: They had ownership of it, and it gave them a sense of pride when they knew what it was about and that other people were going to come and visit. Mummies and daddies could come and have a look. And just such higher order thinking!

Nicky: Problem solving! Working together as a team, and the levels involved were just incredible that you very rarely see in everyday life. You went into a classroom, and there were not children wandering about. They were so involved in their learning, talking about it, discussing it, evaluating it. It was fantastic to have that chance, wasn’t it?

Carolyn: And I think it was that nobody was forcing them to do something. They weren’t setting them a problem that they weren’t interested in or they weren’t inspired to deal with.

Sharon: And as the children came



up with ideas, we ran with it.

Nicky: It was real learning with meaning. It was fantastic!

Sharon: We'd do it again.

Nicky: Oh, yes! Oh, we haven't finished. This is the start! This is the start! We've got great things to come.

The children would approve of Nicky's summation of their work, but they would, no doubt, turn her assessment around a bit to point specifically to what they achieved in the design of the reception area: "Enter our school and you've got great things to come."

How images think

Children and teachers at Hythe saw the images they made as forming and shaping not only their interactions with the reception area space to come but also their ongoing interactions with the world around them. In this view, they parallel a key idea within the design profession and the studies of scientists who try to understand how the mind works in the presence of images (Burnett, 2004). Simply put, images turn into active forces that move people in relationships with one another, produce ideas, and create connections. Images distribute intelligence, and only in our own active mental engagement with the images around us do we move toward fully engaging our intellectual and imaginative powers. Design is intended to enable us to have a living sense of adaptation. The children of Hythe understood this concept very well.

Cross-referencing and interpreting—on the part of both

artist and spectator—provide the backbone of this distribution of intelligence. Such activities underlie all design. Designers expect people to do and think within, through, and with their designs. This is why design is fundamentally about prepositions, those parts of our language that engage objects and animate beings with space, place, emotion, memory, and function. Through the mental processes they call on, images, whether in models, masks, puppet shows, or sketches, operate as sites for empathy, accumulations of information, and windows on a wide range of effects.

At Hythe, images cannot be only about the anticipation of spectators who merely look and see, or only about great things to come. Instead, images provoke lookers to be co-participants and thinkers right now along with the children as those who can narrate the creation of their work in any review. The

intelligence and imagination here and now of the children do, to be sure, find representation within the act of creating their images. Yet also vital is their (often much later) return to their pieces to critique what they have done and to narrate anew their memories of what they were thinking as they produced a particular piece of art. In another booklet in this series — *Hoping for accidents*—the story is recounted of how a Year Two student, Katrina, beheld the kiln accident that fused a clay face she had created with her ring of clay buildings. As soon as she saw it, she declared it to be an accident. Yet, as she studied the configuration, she created a new story for her art about a friendly giant peeping over the bridge of the town to discover what its inhabitants were doing.

The underpinning of discovery learning—or thinking—at Hythe led teachers and students to emphasise looking and feeling perhaps more than any other aspect of life in the school.

Moreover, on their walks around town or visits to other places, such as the library or the fire station, the children attended to how details added up to key messages of first feeling and then function. They sensed that the intention of designers and builders had to come in the combination of details, and they brought these intentions back into their classrooms. When the children felt ready to display an object they had created, a sketch, or a painting, or a piece of writing, discussion often followed about how the piece fitted with other aspects of the environment.

Displays of the children's portraits [see the booklet *Art is all about looking* in this series] were not merely line-ups, but instead collections of work that spoke of relationships. When Roy Smith, Hythe's artist in residence, took down the staff photos that lined the school's former reception area, he scattered them in the centre of the art table and then modelled an oil pastel of Carolyn Chivers, Hythe's Headteacher. But as he drew, he talked of Carolyn's qualities—

particularly her ready smile. The children then picked their own staff photos to study and render in a variety of media. And as they regarded the faces of their teachers and administrators, they talked about their own regard for the adults who taught them: "This was my teacher when I was in Reception. She's so nice! Remember when we..." The children came to see as natural the calling up of individual memories through the aesthetic. Their newly shared stories and descriptive accounts of the portraits of their teachers heightened their involvement as they worked.

When Roy and the Year Two teacher, Claire McIlroy, put the children's work up on the classroom walls, the presentation was quite different from the original line-up display. On the bulletin board of the former reception area, the black and white photos of the teachers were pinned up in neat rows, one face after another. But the classroom display of the children's portraits of the school's adults vibrated with colour. Roy

and Claire found the portraits even further enlivened by the addition of a bit of feather boa here or an equally whimsical decorative relish there. The overall message was, "Here are the adults in our school, but they're alive and colourful and willing to have fun."

Even more important, perhaps, Roy engaged the children in another session where they did self-portraits. When these were completed, he and Claire put these on display so that one could see the children's portraits as well as those of the teachers in the same field of vision but from different points in the room. The message then became, "Here we are together. Not only are adults worthy of display, but we all are!" Any visitor to the school would pass the original photos of the teachers and hardly give the line-up a passing glance, unless to check an image against a name. In Claire's classroom, where the children's and staff members' portraits were exhibited, no quick pass-through was possible.



A visitor would be forced to question: "Why are these here like this? So what are these based on? Who might this be? And who is this?" In many classrooms, uniformity is the name of the game. A teacher reads a story and then asks all the children to create an image they recall from the reading. These drawings or paintings often imitate those of the book's illustrators or, at the very least, they bear strong similarities among the students in the room. The products may then often be lined up in exact rows on the classroom bulletin boards. But not at Hythe.

When the children read a book together with their teacher or teaching assistant, they often carried their interpretations of the work of the illustrators and authors of children's literature into their own artwork. Uniformity was rare, for the children drew very different things, re-negotiating and reinterpreting the narrative and the intentions of the book into a new story—one of their own.



Their own story might well be created in a group, and different children would draw parts of the story, so their tale and its illustrations would go up along with those illustrations of the familiar

characters from the piece of children's literature that had been read to them. Here again, art on display invited relationships, for visitors to these classrooms always asked—“And what is this story about?” What followed was a narration by the young artists of their story created in parallel and along the same theme as that of the storybook.

On the surface, the idea that children would draw after hearing a story does not reflect concepts we might think of as linked to design and intelligence. However, at Hythe, children were encouraged to be creative from, with, and beyond any original stimulus. Thus, a book telling the story of a duck might well generate with a small group of children the idea of creating their own tale of one of their own animals at home

deciding to take off on an adventure. Or an artist's cut paper rendition of “Little Red Riding Hood” could result in the children's own cut paper creations of scenes and themes from their favourite story books. Such inspirations could result in a series of pictures, a mural, or a collage by members of the group. As a result, any lucky visitor could expect to be treated by the children to an oral narration of the current story portrayed through pictures on the display board, as well as to a retelling of the story that served as stimulus for this idea. The children well understood that images communicate thinking, but they were eager to add further explanation—certainly oral communication—to assist the adult viewer into seeing and thinking more deeply about their art.

Journeys on display

Bringing children into the creation of art does not end with their product or performance. The “ends” are in many ways only the beginning. Presenting or displaying art at Hythe commands attention as serious as the actual creation of art. Teachers and teaching assistants thought hard about the numerous learning possibilities within the presentation of art in classrooms and, indeed, throughout the school. Respect for even the roughest or most timid starts of a sketch or a project came through in the discussion that teachers had with the children about what they were trying to accomplish in their work. Often pieces in process were left on worktables so they could be returned to for study and reflection. Once children had decided their work was ready for display, this respect continued in the use of the work in presentation for others to view.

From the construction of the new building that began in 2002

through the construction in classrooms of special learning centres to the display of each creative project with Roy Smith, the school's artist in residence, the children were at the centre of thinking about design and display. Art pieces of the children created in two-dimensions—whether sketches, watercolours, or collages—were likely to appear with dimensionality on their classroom bulletin boards. Teachers had learned to give dimension to the work of children by providing a bubble of space behind the picture, setting different pictures at angles to one another, and encasing work within frames that allowed three-dimensional reshaping of the final work.

A similar approach re-created corners and doorways of classrooms. In every room, special spaces designed and created by teachers and students invited children to enter the world of boats, the train station, the garage, the doctor's office, the queen's

bedroom, and other real-world as well as imaginary places. These niches and corners demanded some kind of literal physical entry—doorways were the right size for children, curtains hung between the niche and the rest of the classroom. Once inside, the children found not only miniature replicas of the boatyard or the train station, often made in part by



them, but also books, posters, pictures, schedules, measuring instruments, artifacts, and other items from the place represented. Every classroom included a special space for reading; in Tracy Green's Year Two class, the space

was a jungle environment hung with vines and plants with bright green leaves as well as long swathes of filmy cloth. This spirit of entering into classrooms to become enveloped in other realms of learning was reflected also in the reshaping through the art of design that framed doorways to the classrooms. Often, both on the inside and outside of the doors, collections of drawings, tiny sculptures, or other artifacts announced some aspect of the learning activities that had gone on or were being planned. Hythe Community School members often spoke of "learning conversations," which were seen as "collaborative journeys of inquiry." Within the metaphor of journey is a collection of ideas that the images all around the school invited everyone to join. With movement and talk (especially questions), anyone coming along on the journey could also find in the design of learning spaces and places opportunities to reflect, document, be an idea resource, and create.

Any visitor entering these journeys might well feel a kinship with a living museum or Exploratorium experience. In the most interactive of environments, exploration through a range of active learning modes and opportunities to assess one's own interpretation against that of others prevails. There are also quiet places for contemplation and consideration available. A sense of discovery moves visitors through the space as well as

invites them to sit and think. Within the school, and most especially within the new building (created with considerable infusion of ideas from the teachers), the inevitability of a range of types of involvement by students and visitors alike comes as no surprise. This drawing in of everyone to certain kinds of activities as well as to essential inter-connections came about largely through the following key features of design:



Unexpected objects and spaces brought participants into their own memories.

– A see-through and see-into philosophy was illustrated through the portholes within the barriers that set off spaces within rooms for special types of activities. Glass walls between the hall and the inside of the rooms literally put on display the active work and play of learning and creating.

– Unexpected objects and spaces brought participants into their own memories as well as into engagement with the places possible within the building. For example, mirrors in different shapes and sizes, placed in odd corners and at different angles, encouraged visitors to stop and see. Large expanses of glass windows opening to the inner courtyard and garden-in-process invited ideas, enabled scientific observations, and created problems (such as mud in the springtime!) the children had to help solve.

– Mobility and change marked the physical dimensions and uses of space inside the building. Within the Year R space, the furniture was

not only children's size, but also created in modules of widely varying shapes that could be rearranged and moved to create not only new types of spaces for different uses, but also places with particular thematic motifs (such as nautical). In essence, the design behind the choice of furniture ensured compatibility between the flexibility in the thinking of teachers and children and the support of the environment for an array of intentions.

– Pathways within the building varied from being "set"—the floor design leading from the entry back through the hallway—to indicating openness of choice for direction and pace of movement.

– Based on the children's successful interaction in weekly art sessions with Roy Smith, the school decided to devote a portion of the reception area for a visiting artist's studio, so that all who entered could see the school's commitment to creative partnerships. Just as the children had seen the specialists plying

their trades during the building's construction, they would now have opportunities to see an artist at work as a professional in a studio. Opening up the world of adult work with the arts enabled creative industry to have a human face.

It is often the case that highly intuitive teachers and children working together discover independently what theorists take years to articulate. For example, within the academic field of museum studies, considerable attention goes to the ways in which museums, galleries, and other display areas for art help visitors "develop" their learning (Hein, 1998). Various theories have been proposed for visitors' aesthetic development (Barker, 1999; Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art, 1998). The following list of "stages" stimulated, accelerated, or held back by design reflects one theory. Reading through this list of stages, purposes, or ends, we see and hear the teachers and children of Hythe Community School talking and thinking about how their use of space, display

areas, and props work for them and those who come to visit.

Accountive: Here art provokes memories from one's own life experiences. Personal stories are called up in response to the art. Emotions attached to these stories and memories can range from delight to melancholy to questioning reflection.

Constructive: Viewers build a framework for entering into the intentions of the artist, generating reflections on what is in the art and what the artist intends, but these are always interpreted through the viewer's own perceptions of what might be natural or should be evident. [See the booklet in this series *Art is all about looking.*]

Classifying: Viewers describe the works before them in terms of comparative knowledge of other works of interpretation. Children look at the illustrations in their books in terms of the work of other illustrators they have met in their reading; children compare one narrative in pictures created by

one group of children with the single picture of another child.

Interpretive: Here the encounter is personal, but is prompted by the line, shape, colour, and character within the piece before them. Critical here is the acceptance by the viewer of the idea that the art's meaning (and perhaps its use) are subject to interpretation, and even a given interpretation is subject to change.

Re-creative: This response is the "willing suspension of disbelief" familiar to all those who have studied literature, drama, and other forms of art. Paintings, theatre, dance, music, and sculptures become old friends that we know will continuously generate joy, surprise, knowledge,

and a sense of movement in intellect and pleasure. Memory, comparison, insight (with special attention to detail), and a sense of the possible and the future infuse the re-creative in new ways on each occasion of reacquaintance.

Some of these purposes can be individual; most are interactive and social. All the complex ways of thinking—from self-regulation to metacognition to problem finding and solving—come into play through this list. The children of Hythe took part in all of these, demonstrating again and again not only the power of their own imaginations, but also ways that keeping their eye on design meant their ideas were in constant engagement.

The essence of morality is empathy for one's fellow human.

Summary

Questions from those not inclined to be enamoured of young children and their art generally ask two things: "Shouldn't there be an emphasis on aesthetic value?" And "if children are granted freedom within their creative works, what keeps each piece from being wildly individual and not intelligible?" Teachers at Hythe Community School, along with Roy Smith, would answer these questions in many ways. Through their interactions with Roy, Ben's team, and other "creative partners," ranging from the local carpenters who worked on the reception area to the librarians and shopkeepers the children met on their visits to libraries and local shops, the children gained a growing confidence in aesthetics. They came to see the importance of judging beauty, style, and coherence through a range of lenses: social, historical, cultural, and functional. In their work on portraits, for example, they rested not a moment on the question of

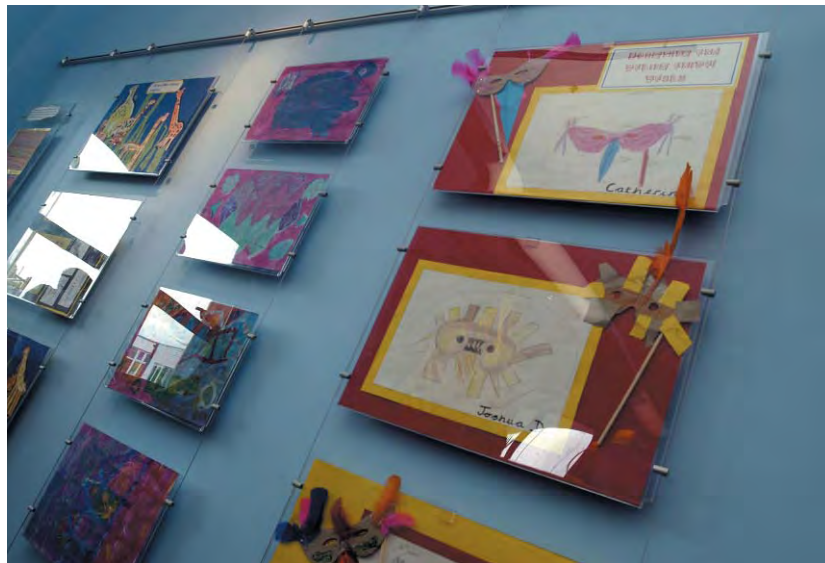
whether or not Van Gogh's self-portrait was beautiful. They went into the meaning of its emotional effect, and words such as *stress*, *frustration*, *sadness*, *loneliness*, and *pain* went into their talk about the piece. They took these perceptions into their own plans for their individual pieces as well as their group-developed projects and works of art.

The essence of morality is empathy for one's fellow human. Through their work with the visiting artists, the children came more and more to enter what may be termed a kind of moral field. Along with Roy and their teachers, the children determined the stories behind art and the intentions the artist carried as well as provoked. As very young children, they were coming to grasp in their own work as artists how intellect, emotion, and imagination have to flow in and around art and its display.

The moral field at work is best

illustrated through the children's engagement in Ben Kelly's display "system" for their art in the reception area. What finally emerged as a "system" began in a much more static way as a fixed "case". The process of emergence as a "system" reflects the children's considered attention about what viewers would get out of the display and how they would see and work through in their own minds the value of the work of individual children and the group as a whole. Though many of the children's "ideal" concepts could

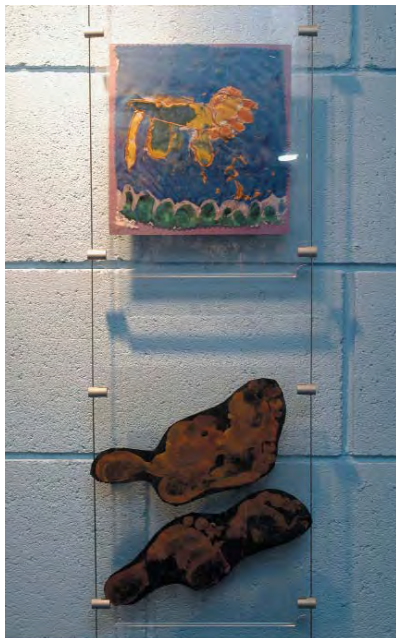
not be put in place as fully or as substantially as they might have wanted, even when cut-backs in costs had to come, as they inevitably did in the display case, for example, every effort was made to try to fulfil the spirit of the Hythe Design Team. Ben Kelly, too, lamented the fact that the original display system designed by his team "unfortunately never found its way into production / installation due to lack of funds." Still, he found a less expensive design system, which was "practical and flexible."



"The display had to be 'something' that would be a process."

The philosophy at Hythe, as must be the case in every school, is ever one of adaptation and moving forward with the best at hand.

Because the children wanted involvement and inclusion, the display had to be “something” that would be a process. The pieces had to be able to move up and down, making them accessible and easy for adults to view, but also easy for children to see from their vantage point.



Children had to be able to change their minds about what they put in the display. The presentation frame for the art should not overwhelm the art itself; of essence was the children’s work and not that of those who built the display. The moods of the children, changing at various times, should be reflected in combination with the piece of art. Hence, the backgrounds or mats or immediate framing of each piece should be able to be changed in texture.

All of these “moral” decisions—coming not only from the perspective of the artists but also that of viewers and audience—resulted in a series of see-through windows suspended on runners that can move the pictures up and down and allow the changing of places as well as the shifting of backgrounds. The runners hold the windows in what appears to be a vertical line-up from ceiling to floor. Several such line-ups of windows may hang all together or in separate parts of the room, enabling groupings by

theme, class, or other classifying guide. If an adult wants to see more closely a picture that may currently be near the bottom in the display, the adult can bring that picture up to his or her line of vision. Children can make the same adjustments.

This spirit of change and accommodation or vision of the endless possibilities within a structure permeates Hythe Community School. Every classroom and open space area takes on multiple roles. The primary entry to the long-established building opens into

the large multi-purpose room that serves as lunchroom, assembly hall, dance studio, and general all-purpose gathering spot. An area that functions much as a central courtyard might, this space encircles the children in stories and their illustrations. One side of the room may present several arrangements of large stand-up figures the children have made to illustrate a piece of children’s literature or historical event. High display areas on other walls similarly bring alive the children’s illustrations of stories they have read. Each display works as a



story mural, helping viewers know the source of the story, key characters, and settings for critical actions.

Once visitors make their way through the all-purpose central space, they enter the room where the four-year olds have gathered. The area is a veritable maze of learning centres where creative projects in a host of media go on simultaneously. The room dividers that help the flow of movement from building blocks to watercolour studio to reading corner burst with pictorial vignettes of designs in progress for castle complexes or characters from a story. On top of the high storage shelves that run along one side of this large room are the recently sculpted Giacometti figures the four-year olds have created with Roy. These are waiting for Roy's next visit, critique sessions, and discussion about the process.

The children will recount to any visitor just how their observations of the dance class that takes

place in the all-purpose room just outside their door provided their understanding of bodies moulded through choreography. Young dancers from nearby Brockhill Park Secondary School come to Hythe Community School once each week to teach dance, and the central location of the all-purpose room serving as dance studio enables all the children to see the art of dance as it shapes and connects props, limbs, torsos, and heads into all kinds of configurations. Learning from nature, building its designs into their own, and moulding what they have done, felt, and seen into new representations fill the days of learning at Hythe.

Of museums, galleries, and other sites for the display of art, contemporary views yearn for dynamism. Hythe Community School could well serve as one model of the presence of change and a range of forms of validation and engagement within display. Information and imagination, while appearing not to be managed at all, are indeed

actively shaped, drawn into conversations, and reassembled. Shifting lenses allow visitors, parents, teachers, and children to sit and leaf through a book, stand and ponder, find a child for a conversation, bend over to look more closely, pass certain things by, and sometimes even forget to move on for a while.

But Hythe is constantly on the move. Its children are painting, shaping papier-mâché into masks, sculpting a dancer's lines in clay, and constructing animals from a creative assortment of materials. What was once a

cereal box is now the body of a pig and a plastic cup is now his nose. With their eye on design, children and teachers know that everything has the potential to be something else, and every piece of art has a story. Indeed, everywhere you look, the children of Hythe are engaging in and arranging art, selecting new pieces for the movable display system and positioning their three-dimensional pieces on its hanging glass shelves. And bright yellow beach buckets, suspended in the air, make it all come to light.



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Creative Partnerships is a national government-funded organisation, managed by Arts Council England, committed to the positive development of young people through cultural practice and creative learning. The aim is to help develop the imaginations and skills of young people through meaningful and sustained cultural experiences in the formal and informal education sectors. Creative Partnerships currently works in 25 areas of England with a range of cultural practitioners, creative industries, businesses, and local government bodies.

Learning for Creative Futures is a series of publications for general, arts practice, and academic readerships, that portrays how learning environments engage children and adolescents in sustained creative work and play. Assuming roles and relationships that bring close association with professionals who work in creative industries, young learners experience the vital mix of imagination, long-term planning, knowledge accumulation, skill development, and informed critique. The international research team of *Learning for Creative Futures* includes scholars from the disciplines of anthropology, education, linguistics, psychology, political science, and sociology. This international enquiry network is led by Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf.

All stories have behind them many other stories. The tales told in this series are no exception. Behind *Visual learning in the community school* are the people and the contexts that give the qualities of character, time, setting, and energy to their narratives of creative learning.

Hythe Community School serves the seaside community of Hythe in Kent. The school provides education at the Foundation Stage (Reception Year and nursery children) and Year 1 and Year 2 ages 4-7 (following the Key Stage 1 curriculum). The school shares its site with Hythe Early Years Centre, which offers full-day and sessional care to children between the ages of 2 and 4 and follows the Foundation Stage Curriculum. Recognising the worth of each child and teacher, the school seeks to transform educational standards and raise achievement, through working with other educational establishments, parents, and the local community. Hythe Community School is a happy, safe and stimulating environment where all members of the community, adults as well as children, are valued as individuals and encouraged to work together. This community school aims to nurture within each person:

- a lifelong love of learning
- the desire to achieve the very best, to rise to a challenge and enjoy success

- the opportunity to speak out, listen to and respect others, sharing the knowledge, skills and understanding we need to live together in harmony within the community
- and the chance to look carefully, reflect on what we have learned and see that the world is a very special place.

Creative Partnerships Kent is run by a small, highly experienced team that has local, national, and international expertise in facilitating cultural and educational programmes. Team members believe in providing the highest quality and most challenging arts and cultural experiences for young people. To this end, they sought partnerships with The Sorrell Foundation (and thereby Ben Kelly Associates), Roy Smith, Shelby Wolf, and Shirley Brice Heath. The quality of work that has taken place is the result of an inspired school and exemplary practitioners who have seriously undertaken the challenge of partnering creatively with teachers, children, parents, and community. These booklets represent sharing of a common vision that extends from artist to administrator, teacher to researcher, adult to child. The experiences enjoyed by the children at Hythe are what Creative Partnerships wants for all children and believes is the entitlement of every child.

The research: From the spring of 2003 through the school year 2004, two scholars, Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf, looked closely at how language, attention, inspiration, and collaboration within Hythe Community School changed through artistic partnership. Their work brought teachers, artists, and students into the research process as questioners, data interpreters, and readers and respondents assessing the results as set forth in this series of booklets. The research upon which *Visual learning in the community school* is based includes transcripts and fieldnotes recorded and analyzed during the year and reported here through thematic patterns. Academic publications of the *Learning for creative futures* series will report detailed comparative analyses of language and cognitive development in the context of specific features of creative learning environments.

Shirley Brice Heath, linguistic anthropologist, has studied how different kinds of learning environments support children's later language development. She takes as her focus within-school creative programmes as well as sustained interactions young people have in their work and play within families, peer relations, and community organisations. She is the author of the classic *Ways with words: language, life, and work in communities and classrooms* (Cambridge University Press, 1986/1996). Heath has taught at universities throughout the world—most notably Stanford University and Brown University, and currently as Visiting Professor at Kings College, University of London. Of emphasis in her research are the long-term effects of learning in environments heavily dependent on the arts. Within this work, she has given special attention to science and environmental projects, and those that encompass social justice concerns. Her resource guide and prize-winning documentary *ArtShow* (2000) feature young leaders in four community arts organisations in the United States. www.shirleybriceheath.com

Shelby Wolf, an award-winning teacher and educational scholar, is a professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Her research centres on children's language and learning through engagement in literature and collaborative as well as creative modes of expression—discussion, writing, the visual arts, and drama. Her most recent book, *Interpreting literature with children* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), portrays her close work with teachers as co-researchers in the study of children's literary learning. She has worked within numerous school-change programmes to validate the perspectives of teachers who undertake enquiry into how learning works in their classrooms. She is a senior author of *Houghton Mifflin English* (2004), a textbook series devoted to helping children improve as writers. With Shirley Brice Heath, she wrote *The braid of literature: children's worlds of reading* (Harvard University Press, 1992). <http://www.Colorado.edu/education/faculty/shelbywolf>.

Working as clients with Ben Kelly Design, the children of Hythe Community School help to design the reception area of their new school building – moving from initial ideas through to critique of the final project. *With an eye on design: the power of presentation* describes how engaging with the display of art develops young children's capacity to empathise with audience and artist. Moreover, the children learn to engage in the cognitive work that is needed to carry inspiration through the design and planning processes into the final product.