

Floor Four

“a magical place of ideas and discovery”



During March – June 2004 the Floor Four project provided a creative exploratorium for children under 6 years in the Great Hall of the Discovery Museum, Newcastle.

A multi disciplinary team of educators and arts enablers supported the children from local nurseries and toddler groups in their creative investigations.

The exhibit comprises narratives which emerged over the six weeks of the project's life. Some narratives developed as children revisited the space and developed their ideas and investigations, others are episodes which demonstrate the prevailing interests and capacities of very young children.

Aims

- *to recognise and nurture creativity*
- *to develop creative initiatives with under fives*
- *to provide advocacy for creative learning*
- *to value individuality and difference*
- *to develop self esteem and respect for others*
- *promote inclusive practice*

Objectives

- *for children*

An opportunity to explore, to imagine, to create and to share ideas.

- *for educators*

Professional development through training and active participation with artists focusing on the child as inventor and creative thinker.

- *for artists*

Professional development for artists focusing on the role of the artist as facilitator and enabler working with educators to encourage children to think and work creatively.

Organisation & Development

Floor Four was the result of a partnership between Sightlines Initiative and Sure Start Westgate Local Programme (Arts Group and Special Needs Play Project) and with support from Sure Start Armstrong and Sure Start Northmoor, Newcastle New Deal for Communities and the Discovery Museum.



Sightlines Initiative

SureStart

Westgate Local Programme

with support from

Newcastle New Deal
for Communities



Panels edited by Chris Holmes and Elaine Mason. Design by Paul Matson.

Where does an idea go?



It is not always obvious how to best support an idea. Adults need to observe closely to understand how children make meaning from their explorations and experiments.

This example describes one pathway for an idea. Many other possibilities exist.

Re-encountering dinosaurs

A group of boys in the nursery had a strong interest in dinosaurs. Small plastic dinosaurs and palm leaves were placed on the OHP to act as a possible provocation to the boys on their first visit. Sabit and Hassan were immediately attracted to the resulting projections. Hassan was interested in touching the shadows that he created.

Hassan: "Dinosaurs eat meat"

Sabit: "He is trying to steal the... (glass gem)"

Hassan: "It's a dinosaurs egg. Oh no, the egg's been stolen."

Sabit: "I will save it," (placing dinosaur on OHP and making fierce noises.)

"There, now we need to keep it safe and look there's another egg." (placing smaller gem on screen.)

Hassan: "now there's two eggs... or is it a tractor?" (he tilted his head and looked at it from another angle.)"

Omar joins the group

"This one's a brontosaurus. He's eating leaves."

Sabit remembers seeing a dinosaur

"In the museum the model was this big. He lives in a shed, he moves, he growls, grrrrr, he moves his head round and round."



On their second visit Sabit, Hassan and Omar revisited the OHP immediately – it becomes the focus of all their attention.

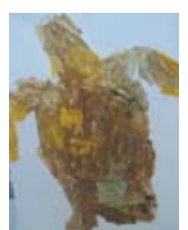
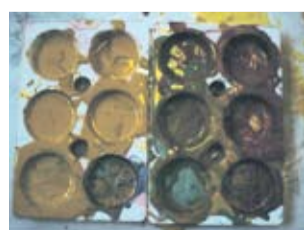
Hassan chose his favourite dinosaur and positioned it on the OHP.

"Triceratops"

They are shown how to make a projection on the wall that could be drawn around.

The boys were excited by this possibility. Hassan decided to paint his dinosaur and chose the paints himself, carefully matching them to the dinosaur model. Silver and red "for the top bits". He worked on his picture for the rest of the session totally engrossed in his activity.

Sabit and Omar also chose paints using the plastic models as their guide. Omar had chosen a turtle, and he mixed greens and yellows in his palette to get the right colour.



Where does an idea go?



Sabit rejected purple paint for his purple dinosaur. Instead he chose red and blue, gradually adjusting the colour until the match was exact.
 Sabit: "I've done it! Look!"
 He held his dinosaur next to his palette.
 He had created a perfect colour match and was very pleased with himself.

What is it about dinosaurs that so interests these boys? Is it the small plastic models that attract them or what the models represent in terms of power and supremacy?

When asked why they liked dinosaurs so much Omar responded "Because I'm not scared of them!"
 Sabit: "Because they're scary."

For their next visit large scale shadow puppets were created from the boy's paintings and placed in the shadow area. This could offer the children the possibility of working with their stories of power in a very physical way.



The dinosaur boys played with these puppets for the whole session. Sabit, Hassan and Omar ran around the space growling, hiding and jumping in and out of spaces trying to scare the others with their dinosaurs. They also had dinosaur fights with each other's puppets, exploring ideas of power and ferocity on a larger scale.



In the last session masking tape, sticks, pens, scissors and large pieces of card were left on the shadow stage as a provocation to the dinosaur boys. The puppets were also placed in this area. This interested the boys who began to make shadow puppets of their own.
 Hassan: "I want one the same – draw round it"
 Sabit: "I know what he means. Draw round it like before then paint it."
 Hassan: "Yes, that's what I mean."

Hassan takes a big piece of card and places the shadow puppet of his painting onto the card.
 Hassan: "I can't get it on the paper".
 He was offered another piece of card. Hassan attaches it and begins to draw around the shape. He is very careful to make sure it doesn't move position and adjusts it as necessary, determined to complete it alone.



The materials and their earlier experiences provoked the children into creating their own puppets.



This required problem-solving, focus and perseverance. Though the project ended at this point the dinosaur ideas still were very potent for these boys, and could well be developed further. How do we as adults help these ideas to flourish and grow?

"We feel that the teacher must be involved within the child's exploring procedure, if the teacher wants to understand how to be the organiser and provoker of occasions, on the one hand, and the co-actor in discoveries on the other. And our expectations of the child must be very flexible and varied. We must be able to be amazed and enjoy, like the children often do. We must be able to catch the ball that the children throw us, and toss it back to them in a way that makes the children want to continue with the game with us, developing, perhaps, other games as we go along."

(Filippini, 1990)

The Hundred Languages of Children, 2nd Edition

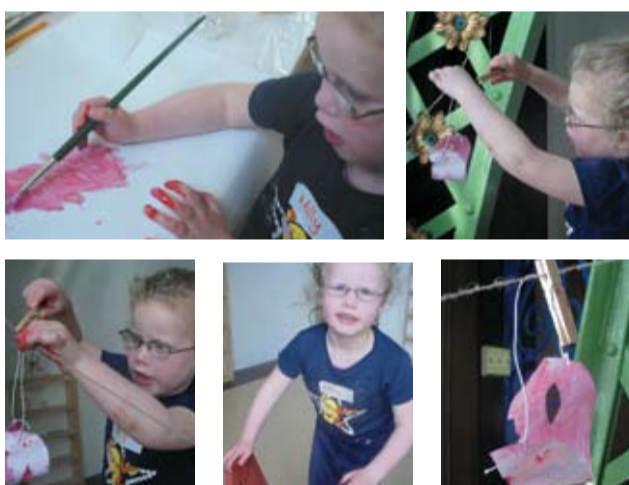
Seeing oneself



Developing a sense of self and other is a complex process. The environment of the project has permitted the children to make many investigations into personal identity. They have experienced the pleasure of transforming themselves; exploring their many reflections and shadows, taking on other identities by dressing up, making masks and becoming 'other'.

They have been able to recognise this different self in play and graphic representation investigating their identity through the medium of the camera, mirrors, digital projections.

A group of children have been engaged in making masks, and then assuming other identities. For the boys this has often meant being dangerous and scary characters – wearing cloaks, wings, crowns and engaging in expansive physical play. Sometimes this exploration can be frightening, even for the protagonists, providing a way of experiencing frightening feelings within the security of the group.



*Jordan dresses himself in a black cloak.
Steven: "This is the monster trying to get you."*

Emily and Milly both make masks that they choose to decorate with pink metallic paint. For Milly it seems to be the making, decorating and painting that is important. "I'm going to wear it for home"
What will your Mam think?
"She'll be scared."



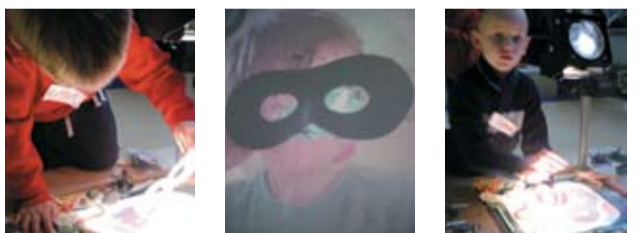
For Emily, wearing the mask allows her to become someone else. "When I've got the mask on I'm not Emily anymore."

Emily is exploring the idea of being real 'Emily' and being imaginary 'someone else'. She seems pleased to be 'other' until she glimpses her reflection in the mirror. She changes her mind. "Yes, I am Emily."
Is the masked Emily too remote from the identity she knows? Perhaps her masked image is a little unnerving and frightening?
Emily is happier being herself behind the mask, at least for the moment.



"Children seem to start little games when they enter a new role or character, but they remain in control and can go in or out at will."

One Hundred Languages of Children 2nd edition



Through using the OHP Steven and Kieran construct a different way of being masked. Placing their real masks over their acetate images to create bigger, more powerful masked selves.

Seeing oneself – “Me”



“Mirrors are a way for children to get to know themselves and can be very powerful when they begin to experiment with ideas about themselves. . . (they) can provide insights on living with yourself and who you are.”

(One Hundred Languages of Children 2nd edition)

Rashida and Fahmida, twin sisters, have been interested in observing themselves in the convex mirrors which create multiple reflections...

The plastic covered frame in the studio afforded the sisters further opportunities to play with identity.

The twins positioned themselves on either side of the plastic and began to draw a composite face, adding elements from each side.

Rashida took the drawing further by climbing a stepladder so that she could draw on both sides of the plastic.



Rashida and Fahmida’s mother commented that the girls often seem to negotiate roles and identities – first one, then the other sister being dominant. Could their graphic representation be another way of exchanging identities?

Rashida has played further with her idea of identity holding her acetate image over her face and being Rashida twice over. Then placing her acetate self on a stool, and taking herself for a ride, winding the stool

up and down, as she had done earlier when playfully sitting on the stool.

Being in someone else’s shoes is a very interesting experience for children. The wearing of high-heeled shoes was a popular transformative possibility for the children and shoes were worn on hands as well as feet. They have created a soundtrack for the project – high heels clattering across the floor, making audible the children’s progress around the space.



The children used face paints to decorate themselves and each other.

When the children have control of the paint, the images they choose to create are very different to those they select as passive recipients of face painting. They chose to become scary lions and kings or painted lips, cheeks and nails to become mams.



Are children more inspired, given the opportunity, to want to become the person who is their greatest role model?

Exchanges



“It’s for you”

What does it mean when an offering is made by a child?

Exchanging objects is a powerful tool of communication and means of making connections with others. The children’s natural inclination to sociability and exchange has been seen frequently in **Floor Four**. From toddlers exchanging blankets and glances, to children sending and receiving messages, tokens and gifts.

This desire to communicate and exchange was supported by providing a message area comprising boxes, drawers, and materials for drawing and writing. Within the space, however, the children found many other ways to engage in this act of giving and receiving, which seems important to them. For the very youngest children the exchanges can be simple, but just as significant as the more complex messages exchanged by older children.

Sonia and Melissa had been exchanging messages and tokens in the post office in their nursery. On discovering the message area they continue with this interest selecting items from the carousel – shells, pebbles, feathers and pictures creating their own ‘messages’ for exchange and sealing them in envelopes, bamboo tubes and paper parcels.

Melissa: “These are for my mammy”

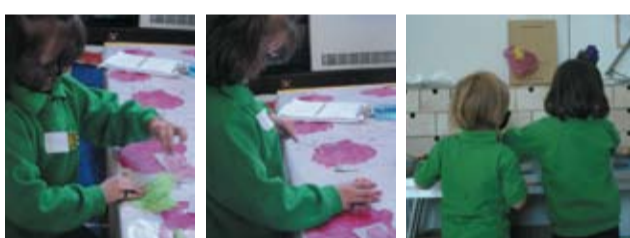
Sonia: “I’m drawing a picture for my mammy”

The girls are interested to find pictures of themselves inside the message boxes.

Sonia: “Look, it’s me.”

She sticks her image onto the drawer of the message box, creating her own mailbox, making possible further exchanges.

“There.”



Sonia revisits the message area next session with the intention of making more messages.

“I want to do sticking”

She investigates her drawer and finds tiny envelopes and tags.

She goes to the making table and selects tissue paper “I’m cutting it”. She covers the envelopes in green and pink and offers C one of the envelopes.

“This is for you. I made it for you. You can put it in your drawer.”

C explains that she does not have a drawer.

Sonia wants to make this exchange possible, so makes

a drawer for C. She draws a picture of C on a post it, sticks it to the drawer next to her own, and puts in the envelope.

“There, that’s your drawer now.”

She gives C a second envelope, and then makes another token, a picture with stickers on and writing. “That’s your name.”

Georgia has been watching and joins Sonia. Sonia helps Georgia make herself a drawer too. Then Claire joins them and together they show her how to make her own drawer.

Sonia: “Draw your picture, stick it, and put something in”.

Sonia is active in organising the physical environment to encourage the giving and receiving of messages. She uses these exchanges to communicate and to establish relationships.

Revisiting the message table on the last day, Sonia discovers the pictures that she took with the digital camera in her drawer.

“Look, pictures.”

She sorts through them, and sticks them onto her drawer. She covers each side of the drawer in her pictures.

“It’s like a book.”

At the end of the session Sonia brings her Mother to the message table. She collects the pictures from her drawer and gives them to her Mam, explaining who everyone is.



Her Mam admires the photos and asks “Are you going to be a photographer?”
Sonia: “Yes.”

Exchanges (continued)



Robbie and Ellie are friends. When they meet in the space, Ellie approaches Robbie and offers him her blanket with a warm look. He takes it, and carries it off as he begins to explore, with Ellie in his wake. Later, Ellie gives Robbie a magnet, which he adds to his arrangement.

A group of children had been very interested in the idea of treasure. The glass nuggets and crystal drops in the studio had represented for them a hoard of treasure. Each visit had seen the children searching for treasure, collecting exchanging and concealing their finds.

On their final visit, William Nathan and Zira discover new treasure. Pink glass cubes concealed in a wooden box with a lock and key.

Zira helps unpack the box.

William has an idea "Shall we give them to everyone?"

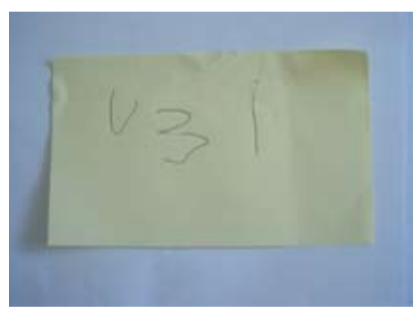
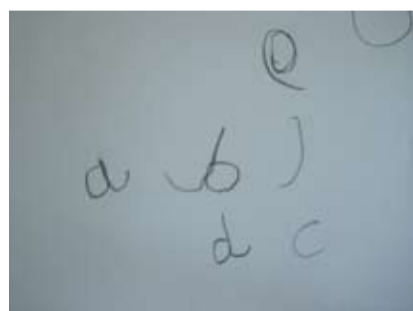
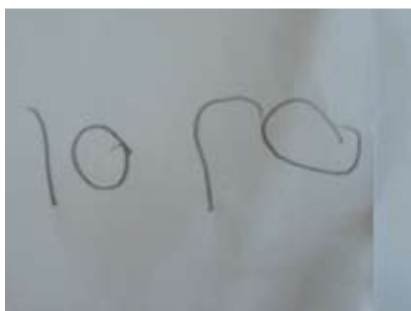
The others agree. William goes around the Great Hall, giving each of his friends a cube of treasure.

This generous gesture enables William to make a welcome connection with his classmates. But later, he decides that he would like to reclaim the treasure, and this causes a disturbance, as the others are reluctant to return his gift.

Sometimes the impulse to share is militated against by the desire to possess and claim ownership for oneself.



Some Messages



Flirting with danger



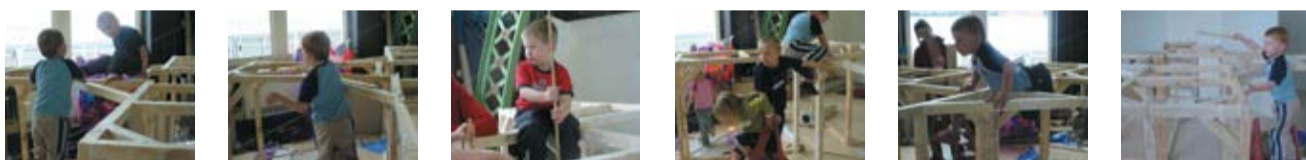
“Our image of the child as rich, strong, competent and most of all connected to adults and children.”

Loris Malaguzzi (1997)

Underpinning the idea of the Floor Four project was this image of ‘the rich, strong, competent child.’ The ethos of the project, informed by this idea of children, was one where children were encouraged to take responsibility for themselves, to be allowed the time and space to exercise their competence, and to let their abilities grow.

Robert was the first to get the stepladders. He and Brooke took and used sticks as paintbrushes to play the part of decorators “I’m painting the roof”

Curtis appeared, climbing straight up the ladder and taking everything off the structure. Curtis, Kieran and Callum climbed up to and along the highest point of the structure. Callum sitting and dangling his feet over the four foot drop. In another space an elevated ‘drawing’ platform had been provided that was largely ignored by the boys. So this play was not simply about being high above the floor.



Perhaps it was opportunity for risk and danger that enticed them. To heave themselves up onto a wooden framework, where there was nothing between them and the ground apart from their own endeavour must have been a personal achievement. They rose to a challenge that they set for themselves probably reaching just a bit further than they had previously been able/allowed to.



To be at the top of stepladders changes your environment in terms of height and view but more significantly introduces risk -

a challenge which perhaps defines us as humans, the need to test ones self, to emerge unscathed and then move on to new challenges.



The next session Curtis repeated the activity, climbing the steps and removing any covering to the frame. He climbed on the structure but it seemed not to hold the same attraction and he soon moved on.

He took the steps and moved them to different parts of Floor Four, initially becoming ‘Bob the

Builder’ climbing them where ever he roamed and playacting a ‘job’ of work. After this the steps became his constant companion; he rarely climbed them but strongly defended his ‘right’ to possess them. Later he abandoned the ladders. Something else had engaged him. Perhaps he had explored the possibilities of the ladders sufficiently and they were no longer enough of a challenge for him.



“I can do it!”

– Molly

Molly climbs up the stairs of the rainbow ramp and slides down, on her stomach, very fast. She is smiling and repeats the climbing and sliding.

She pauses before jumping down each step, one at a time, holding tightly to the side.

“One, two...”

She jumps to the bottom. She is shown a photo of the jumping and smiles. Next Molly moves around the ramp and hangs from the side, swinging her legs from side to side. She goes to see the picture of her action, and repeats it, then checks again the photographic record.

Being able to manage independently is very important to Molly. At the end of the session her Dad explains that Molly is very determined and fiercely independent.

The way in which children develop and perceive their identities is very much shaped by how they are produced and taken up through the practices of representation. Perhaps the images shown to Molly helped to make real her idea of herself as powerful, dynamic and capable?



Friendships

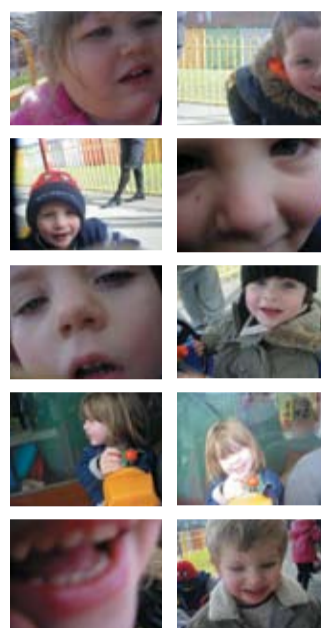
- Friendship can be a strong link between children fostering curiosity and exchange
- Friendship can help to solidify their identity as a group
- Young children who are friends tend to co-operate more than children who are not friends, and motivate each other to try new things.
- Friends provide an especially attentive audience when presenting work to others.

(One Hundred Languages of Children 2nd Edition)



Friendships and families have been a significant focus of the children's work. In their learning groups, graphic representations and play, the idea of friendship and community has been represented and explored.

Sonia is very interested in the digital camera. She quickly learns how to use the camera and begins to document the nursery. Asked to record what she likes best Sonia chooses to collect images of her friends. The children respond enthusiastically to Sonia's photography, and take pleasure in seeing themselves as part of this community of friends.



Playing at Floor Four, the children often project their ideas about the importance of friendship. Using the animals on the OHP, Robert notices a group

of frogs, identical in size and shape, but differently coloured. He arranges them on the plate and looks at the corresponding image on the screen. "Look, they're friends."

The breeze from the open window causes the screen to gently undulate. This interests Robert. "They're moving."

His mother asks him why this is. "It's because they're all frogs, and they're jumping." Later he revisits the OHP and finds one of the frogs is missing. He is visibly distressed. "We've got to find the frog because it's a friend." With his mother, he searches the space until the frog is found and reunited with its companions. It seems that the idea of being in a friendship group is very important to Robert, and that being separated from friends is an unhappy experience.



Hannibal, in his graphic representation, focuses strongly upon the idea of friendship groups and his inclusion in this community for the duration of the project. He draws a picture. Omar, "my friend", himself, and Sakib, "my friend."

Abdul joins him. Hannibal draws Abdul, who gestures that he would like the pen. Abdul draws himself next to the image of Hannibal, perhaps offering himself as a friend. Kyle joins the group. He has some modelling clay and adds to the drawings, adding clay features. Kyle "He's got ears now. Look, I've put his arm up."

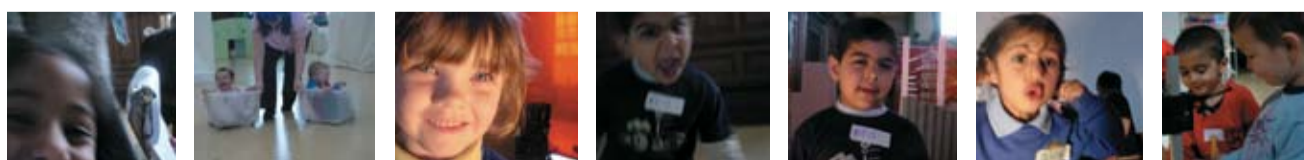
This representing of the friendship group, with Hannibal at the centre gives him, and the other boys great pleasure.

Hannibal repeatedly makes these introductions and communications through his drawings. He seems to enjoy the process of representing himself and his friends in relationship, and of communicating these relationships to the adults in the project.

Do the drawings make tangible his relationships, and consolidate the idea of friendships? In sharing the friendship drawings with his peers, is Hannibal seeking to reinforce the idea of their friendship and relationship?



Children's own pictures of their friends



Encountering environments



“It’s like a church you can dress up in”

– Kosta

How do we create a space for the enquiring competent child? At Floor Four many spaces were created all of which had the potential to be continually transformed and reinvented by the children who inhabited them.

As the project progressed, many questions emerged, most significantly, ‘How differently do children and adults understand the potential of different spaces?’

The children led the adults to an understanding of what the space could be through their inventive use of areas which was often quite different from that envisaged by the design team.

The construction frame was sometimes a place to encounter height. The drawing station a place to hide and conceal yourself, or to meet with friends and talk, rarely to draw. Within the time scale of the project there was an ebb and flow as different areas were developed and abandoned by different groups of children.

The space became:

“An environment which is empathetic, which grasps the meaning of, but also gives meaning to, the life of the people who inhabit it.”

Children Spaces Relation (1998)



message space



dress up area



drawing platform



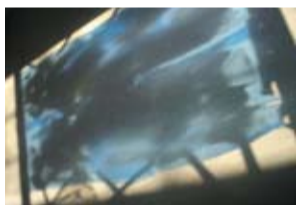
space



geodome den



construction



shadow stage



studio

Making Journeys



The space of the Great Hall lent itself to the possibility of exploration and journeys. Melissa has been collecting things and carrying them around the Great Hall. She has three bags with her. “It’s my things.”

When they are unpacked at the end of the session they contain: A tutu, two sparkly shawls, a gold wrap, a gold dress, a crown, a gold necklace, a black feather boa, a dish mop, a pink feather, one lolly stick. The previous week a bag full of things had been found at the end of the session.



Had Melissa been collecting and transporting things then too? Her play has been characterised by a purposeful journeying around the hall, usually carrying things and wearing her ‘noisy shoes’ which make her progress more audible to her and other children. It is likely that this pattern of behaviour is a ‘schema’, helping her explore abstract concepts and make cognitive connections through her recurring physical engagement with the activity.



Purposeful investigation

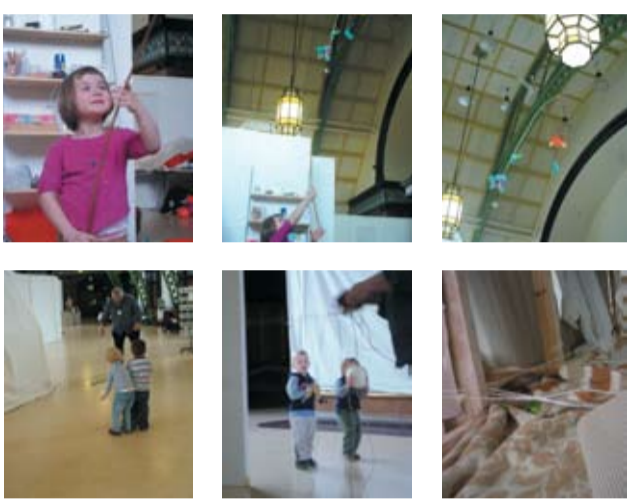


The scale of the hall initially amazed many of the children, and their curiosity about the structure led to experiments.
“Why’s there a bridge up there?” – Laura

A recurring theme was – how to reach the ceiling, and the lights. Being able to reach the highest points of the space seemed to be important to many children. For the boys especially, it involved climbing step ladders and reaching up with bamboo canes and withies, testing the height.

For the girls, these same experiments were conducted with the use of ‘sky sticks’ – withies and canes which they decorated with cellophane, tissue and wire before investigating the height of the lights. Can it be that the desire to explore all the space, to touch the ceiling, and the walls, in some way makes the space ‘knowable’? Helping to form a mental map of the environment through challenge and exploration

In attempting to understand the space and perhaps the materials in it, a group of boys made traps from wool and string that stretched across the width of the hall, and then filled the construction frame.



The boys were certainly purposefully engaged – the wool/string unravelling provided a great game but also an exciting context for a myriad of scientific and mathematical investigations concerning the nature of materials. They physically explored the strength and flexibility of the string, playing with concepts of length and distance. They discovered that a round ball can become long and thin and can then be taut or floppy and found out more about the joy of experimenting in a large space with a friend, uninterrupted.

Being physically expansive



With it’s huge amount of circulation space, the Great Hall permitted the children to be physically expansive.

They used the space to run, spin and slide, to explore the vertical and the horizontal.

Jenna loved sliding down the rainbow ramp. And she loved using a length of voile as a sled to transport smaller children around the space.

She combined these two loves of hers, experimenting with the voile, placing it on the slide, and discovered that she could slide faster and further with the voile underneath her.

This led to other children joining in the experiment, sliding and spinning far across the floor, almost to the other side of the room. They tried different fabrics to see which one was slippiest and fastest.

Then arranged for an adult to shift the ramp around, so that their sliding path was clear...

The children physically described the space of the hall, weaving in and out of the circular structures, making their own routes through the space.

Often in costume, running through the space, the freedom to be physically active on a large scale was something that engaged the children strongly.



Using Expressive Languages

*Within the context of the project the adults asked themselves:
How do we support children in their communications and representations?
How can we provide opportunities and occasions for children to express themselves and make relationships?*

Because many of the children who visited the project had English as a second language, these questions were especially pertinent. The children were encouraged to use many expressive languages, and the adults through observation and intervention were able to make these expressions tangible to the children.



Abdul is on the edge of the dinosaur group, watchful and quiet. He smiles and observes the others but does not choose to join them.

He moves around the studio space, on the edge. Later he settles alone at the round light table. In the quiet he concentrates on the circular light, and explores the glass globes filled with bubbles. Picking them up, slowly spinning them, feeling their weight. He seems absorbed in this action, quite composed and self-possessed. Abdul, like many of his peers, has English as a second language. He uses smiles and body language to communicate on this occasion and rarely speaks.

Aisha joins Abdul in exploring the effects made by the glitterball and together they start to move it faster and faster, entranced by the patterns moving very fast around the area. They have created a centrifuge of light. Omar watches intently then covers the projector and his hands glow red, Abdul and Aisha join him in covering the projector and watching their hands glow together.

Omar, Aisha and Abdul have made connections through their explorations of moving light. This engaging context has provided Abdul with the motivation to share his experience through movement and words.

During the next session Abdul revisits the sensory space. He indicates with a gesture that he wants the glitterball again. It is offered to him, then the projector light is directed onto it. Abdul repeats his experiments of the previous week, sending streams of light spinning around the space. He is powerful here, controlling the process completely, and with eye contact and smiles, shares with the adults his pleasure and engagement. Abdul seems to be fascinated by the circular movement that he is creating. He also tosses the glitterball into the air, over and over again. Catching it with a sure touch in the darkness, again, making eye contact and smiling a communication to the adults.

Later, Abdul is in the shadow area where the dinosaur boys are at play. He watches Hassan in the big mirror, and then focuses on his own reflection. Looking

During the next visit, Abdul joins Omar, Aisha and T in the darkness of the sensory space. They explore using torches and neon light. T shines the wheel projector onto the wall. The movement interests the children.



Omar: "Look, it's falling down!" He produces a feather duster and puts it in front of the projector.
Omar: "Look at this. What is it, it's a leaf? It's gone"
Aisha is interested in the possibilities of the projector, and moves the glitterball before it, making beautiful colours stream around the space.
Aisha: "Look at them"
Abdul takes the glitterball and moves it towards the projector, watching the spinning patterns that he creates.
Abdul: "oohh look at that"
Abdul moves the glitterball around watching the patterns moving around the area. He invites Aisha to join him.
Abdul: "Aisha, look, look, Aisha, look"



first deliberately at C to establish contact, he begins to spin around and around, watching his spinning reflection in the mirror.

He looks again at C, inviting her to watch his spinning game. Is Abdul re-enacting the spinning motion that he had made from light in the dark room? He is shown a photo of his spinning. He smiles a huge smile, and begins to dance again, spinning and jumping. Khaled joins him, and together they jump and spin themselves across the stage in a circular dance.

Abdul returns with Khaled to see the picture of his dance, smiling at the result. Abdul, through movement, has found a powerful medium to communicate with others. Whilst he seldom speaks, his strong interest in movement, particularly circularity, has helped him find a way to express himself, and to communicate with his peers and the adults. The photos of his explorations with movement and light offer Abdul the possibility to revisit and consolidate his experiences.

"The human species has the privilege of expressing itself in a plurality of languages (in addition to the spoken language)... every language has the right to be fully developed, and the more this is made possible, the more one language works with the other languages in a process of mutual enrichment."

(The Hundred Languages of Children Catalogue of the exhibit | 1996)

Graphic expression



“Dance, drama, painting, sculpture, music, facial expression, body language, mathematical symbols, eye contact, and touch, are all important ways of representing and communicating, and are often just as precise as spoken words.”

(Time to Play 1991)

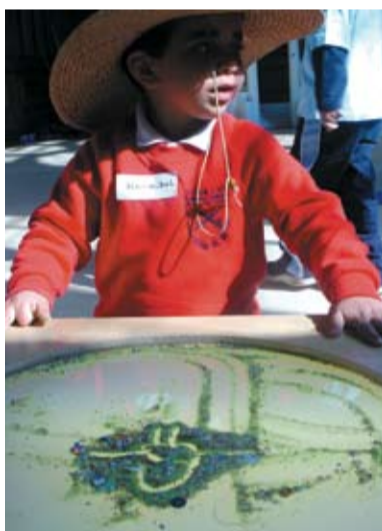
On his first visit to the project Hannibal becomes engaged in drawing his family and friends on the whiteboards with a black marker pen. He is shown the photos of his drawings. He is very pleased, and makes more drawings to be recorded in this way.

“It felt like we had entered into a visual conversation – Hannibal had found a way to communicate with me and this meant that we could begin to learn about each other. I gave him a lot of time and attention which gave him great encouragement and he wanted to share his drawings with me more and more.”

Malcolm Smith, Artist-enabler



On his next visit Hannibal goes back to the white board and resumes his drawings. Again he draws himself and his friends. His activity attracts some of his friends who join in adding figures and naming them. Hannibal is delighted by this interest in his ideas from his peers and continues to explore his visual language in each session.



“Putting the ideas into a form of graphic representation allows the children to understand that their actions can communicate. This is an extraordinary discovery because it helps them realise that in order to communicate, their graphic must be understandable to others. . . graphic representation is a tool of communication much simpler and clearer than words.”

(The Hundred Languages of Children 2nd edition)



The following week when Hannibal is in the studio he notices the marks in the sand on the light table, rubs them out and begins to draw a figure.
“Hannibal”
A photo is taken
Hannibal “I want to see me.” He smiles at his image. . .
He rubs it out and draws another figure
“Daniel. He’s my friend”
He rubs out Daniel and draws another figure.
“Sabit. He’s my friend.”
Seeing the photographs of these friendship drawings seems important to Hannibal. Is he presenting himself in community, as part of a friendship group, to adults who are just getting to know him? Perhaps his activity also reinforces his own identity as part of this group and theirs too.



Sabit, Hassan and Omar are great friends.
It was clear that Hannibal liked them all very much as he often joined in their activities and often drew them in his pictures. However the other boys communicate fluently in English. By finding a graphic medium for communication, Hannibal was helped to become part of the friendship group.

His teacher remarked that she had never seen Hannibal so absorbed in his work. Through using graphic expression Hannibal was able to demonstrate his competence to his friends and his teachers.