

# Designing with Children

## Little Beasties

'Little Beasties' was a Sorrell Foundation project implemented at Hinde School, Sheffield. Part of the joinedupdesignforschools programme, the key aim was to personalise children's learning experiences and enrich them with extra-curricular, hands-on activities. Overall, four workshops were led by Walters & Cohen architects in March 2004 with the participation of a group of 6-10 children aged 11-12 years old. The emphasis was placed on the design process throughout.

### Motivation

As with other joinedupdesignforschools projects (the programme was launched in 2000), this one, too, aimed at bringing together designers with children in a creative exploration of design solutions that would enhance their learning. In this respect, the Sorrell Foundation saw children and young people as clients of school design projects and thus developed a model of involvement intended to give them control and responsibility. This approach was accompanied by learning: thanks to their engagement, students were expected to develop life skills, such as team-working, problem-solving and communication, which would in turn lead to their heightened self-esteem.

### Children's involvement

The pupils who took part in the 'Little Beasties' project were selected by the School Council. They were engaged in the following design stages: concept, brief development and design development. The process involved an inspirational visit to London Zoo and the Science Museum, model-making activities, creating mood boards and collages and playing a hands-on board game. All these activities enabled the pupils to understand the design process and articulate their ideas to the designers. The designers then developed proposals which they presented back to the pupil client team for comment.

### Outputs and outcomes

Children's engagement with the above activities led to the design of a new science space

#### What

A new science space at Hinde House School, Sheffield

#### Where

Sheffield, United Kingdom

#### Age

11-12

#### Group Size

6-10

#### Project Stage

Brief, Concept, Design Development

#### Children's Roles

Clients, Expert Consultants

#### Timescale

March 2004

#### Partners

Michál Cohen and Božana Komljenović,  
Walters & Cohen (Architects)  
Anne McCraig, The Nature Room (Landscape architect)  
Pupils of Hinde School (Participants)

called 'Little Beasties'. This new facility comprises a pavilion and outdoor spaces which form a laboratory for the pupils to study local flora and fauna.

The adult participants felt that the pupils learned a great deal from the process. After four months of engagement in design they had developed a real insight into the design profession, according to one of the designers. The qualities that the children brought to the process were also greatly valued: *'they've been so enthusiastic I wish we had more clients like that. They had to take responsibility for the planting and maintenance. It was great to see their development of a sense of responsibility and care for their environment'* (Michál Cohen, architect).

Feedback from both the pupils and teachers suggests that pupils also had a sense of agency in the process, which positively challenged the usual learning and teaching approaches adopted in school: *'... [the designers] did listen to what we said and they came back with this plan that was exactly what we wanted. You feel like you're more important because you get to know design secrets and plans and you get to take part in it. So I felt kind of special'* (Pupil client team member).

*'As teachers we direct children all the time. This project, by making the children clients, allows them to direct themselves, to explore and develop a project important to them and this environment'* (Nick Thompson, Acting Head).

## Resources

Personal communication with Michál Cohen (1 May 2005).

Walters and Cohen Architects. 'Little Beasties'  
[http://www.waltersandcohen.com/projects/all\\_projects/?p=little-beasties](http://www.waltersandcohen.com/projects/all_projects/?p=little-beasties) (accessed 16 June 2013).

Sorrell, J. and Sorrell, F. (2005). *Joinedupdesignforschools*. London, Merrell.

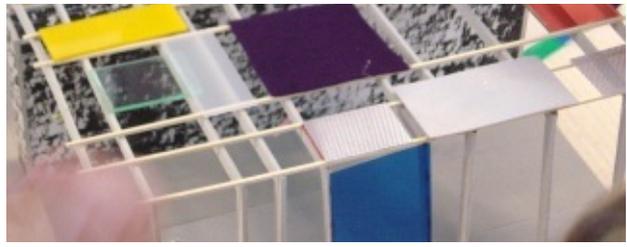


Courtesy: Walters and Cohen Architects





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