

# **Learning to learn – using self-awareness of learning styles to promote language learning**

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*Dedicatória Pessoal*

*À minha família,  
aos meus colegas e amigas,  
ao Gilberto e à Lídia, pelo seu apoio incondicional  
às três Mosqueteiras Ana, Graça e Rubina  
e aos meus alunos, sem os quais este estudo teria sido impossível.*

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## LEARNING TO LEARN – USING SELF-AWARENESS OF LEARNING STYLES TO PROMOTE LANGUAGE LEARNING

Abstract

**KEYWORDS:** metacognition, self-awareness, learning styles, learning to learn, learner autonomy, differentiated tasks, young learners

The present study was developed as part of the practicum of my master's degree in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in primary school with the aim of understanding of the concepts of metacognition and self-awareness of learning styles to promote language learning. Another aim of the study was to determine and develop differentiated tasks related to personal learning styles within the daily context of learning. The participants were 25, 4<sup>th</sup> form students aged between 9 and 10 years old. Action research was the methodology applied in this one class environment which comprised both qualitative and quantitative data collection by means of questionnaires, visual aids, teaching journals and weekly reflections for the *Seminário de Orientação da Prática Supervisionada 2* (SO PES2), one of the Master degree courses. Results were debated through open class discussion and reflective questioning, that is, students were encouraged to share their opinions on learning styles and learning strategies as a means to develop self-awareness of these. The study demonstrated that young learners are able to reflect on learning preferences and to critically analyse their learning styles thus gaining a deeper understanding of themselves as learners. This also allowed them to develop strategies to deal with their strengths and weaknesses.

## **APRENDER A APRENDER – USANDO A AUTO-CONCIÊNCIA DE ESTILOS DE APRENDIZAGEM PARA PROMOVER A APRENDIZAGEM DE LÍNGUAS**

Abstract

**KEYWORDS:** metacognição, autoconsciência, estilos de aprendizagem, aprender a aprender, autonomia do aluno, diferenciação pedagógica, alunos de 1º ciclo

Este estudo foi desenvolvido como parte do estágio do Mestrado de Ensino de Inglês de 1º Ciclo tendo como objectivo a exploração dos conceitos de metacognição e autoconsciência dos estilos de aprendizagem para promover a aprendizagem linguística. O estudo pretende também determinar e desenvolver tarefas de diferenciação pedagógica relacionadas com o estilo de aprendizagem pessoal dentro do contexto diário do ensino. Os participantes foram 25 alunos do 4º ano de escolaridade com idades compreendidas entre os 9 e os 10 anos. A metodologia aplicada foi um projecto de investigação-acção no ambiente de uma turma e que implicou a recolha de dados qualitativos e quantitativos através de questionários, auxiliares visuais, diários de ensino e reflexões semanais para o *Seminário de Orientação da Prática Supervisionada 2* (SO PES2), uma das cadeiras deste mestrado. Os resultados foram debatidos através de discussão aberta em turma, ou seja os alunos foram encorajados a partilhar as suas opiniões sobre estilos e estratégias de aprendizagem, como forma de desenvolver a autoconsciência dos estilos e estratégias de aprendizagem. O estudo revelou que os alunos da primária são capazes de reflectir acerca das suas preferências de aprendizagem e de analisar de forma crítica os seus estilos de aprendizagem, aprofundando assim o seu conhecimento de si mesmos como alunos e desenvolver estratégias para lidar com as suas qualidades e fraquezas.

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## **Introduction**

### **1. Background to the study**

Learning preferences, learning styles, self-awareness and metacognition have long been fields of research and have been considered valuable for language learning. Children are able to reflect on their learning preferences and to develop self-awareness from an early age. Coutinho (2007) advocates that children with good metacognitive skills, such as the ability to monitor their learning, reflect, compare, self-assess, among others, have better outcomes and she also supports that metacognitive skills may be taught to improve academic performance. Ellis and Ibrahim's (2015) assertions on learning to learn show us that raising self-awareness and thinking about oneself as a learner is paramount to the development of learning strategies and the enhancement of learning motivation and academic outcomes.

“A learning style, or cognitive preference, is a consistent way of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning” (Chambel & Guimarães, 2009). Learning styles have been debated, defended and disapproved by several experts and they continue to be debated, debunked and even successfully applied, as Othman and Amiruddin (2010) have suggested. From the several models of learning styles, such as the multiple intelligences learning style model, I chose a sensory approach using the VARK questionnaire, VARK being an acronym which stands for visual (V) aural (A) read/write (R) and kinaesthetic (K) learning styles

### **2. How did the idea originate?**

As a learner I always felt that I was very fortunate to have realised from an early age how I learnt best as it allowed me to take advantage of the tools at my disposal to both improve my learning techniques and my marks. When I first read the work of Ellis and Ibrahim (2015), I realised that without my being aware of it my teachers might have helped me to know myself as a learner by telling me that I was an attentive listener and thus encouraging me to learn foreign languages. By doing this, teachers did encourage me to develop individual skills to learn better. This study therefore originated from my early self-awareness of my own learning style and the subsequent advantages that came from that awareness, as well as my desire to develop my students' metacognitive skills by teaching them how to learn.

My teaching experience has proven that English classes are heterogeneous in terms of English levels and cognitive abilities within the same age group, varying

according to aptitude, motivation level and previous contact with English. This year I was co-teaching in a class of 25 learners, 4 with specific cognitive impairments. These special education needs (SEN) learners struggle to participate in some activities because most of them were diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia or dysorthographia, speech and language disabilities (SLDs). SLDs may condition progress in language learning and also integration in pair or group activities, probably due to the fact that these impairments are related to language acquisition and production. Since SLDs are beyond my professional skills and more within the range of knowledge of specialist therapists, they will not be highlighted in this research.

### **3. Aims of the study**

The aim of this research was to understand how raising self-awareness of learning styles might contribute to language learning and a more inclusive learning environment. The main objectives of this action-research project were primarily to help me understand the concepts of metacognition and learning to learn and to gain further understanding of one of the metacognitive strand: self-awareness. Secondly, and considering that each child is unique, my aim was to discover my learners' learning style through translated VARK (2017) tests, since there were adapted tests for children available online. Thirdly, after grouping the learners in each of the learning styles' group to do project work tasks, I would like to understand how task adaptation to a particular learning style could support language learning and if it could help learners to reflect and identify their strengths and shortcomings by contrasting learning style based project work (related to specific activities designed to fit each VARK group) with their regular lesson which cover all the skills (visual, aural, read/write and kinaesthetic). This was achieved by reflecting on what tasks might suit each learning style the best. Learners were encouraged to reflect on their own learning styles and the types of tasks they performed and to understand themselves better as learners. As a teacher it helped me to raise my own self-awareness to develop specific classroom activities.

“How can learning to learn and raising self-awareness of learning styles contribute to language learning?” and “What activities may suit each VARK group?” were the research questions that shaped this study and that allowed me to know how the development of learning styles and adapted tasks could raise my learners' self-awareness and improve their language learning.

The first chapter reviews literature which contextualizes and provides background information to support my study. The second chapter focuses on the action research context, methodology and results. Furthermore it features discussion and conclusion which underlines the implications for further research and the contributions of the research to my development as a teacher. In addition it presents results and finishes with a conclusion where the implications for further research and the benefits of the study to my development as a teacher are discussed.

## **Chapter I Literature Review**

### **I. Introduction**

Foreign language learning depends on various factors such as motivation, previous knowledge, parental encouragement, personal aptitude and preference. Using self-awareness to promote a better knowledge of oneself as a learner may contribute to language learning in the long run. According to Vrugt and Oort (2008) and Othman and Amiruddin (2010), learning styles and learning preferences play a role in raising learners' self-awareness and the authors invite teachers to adapt and differentiate tasks and teaching methods. Learning strategies are commonly defined as one's attitude and behaviour towards a specific goal and comprise self-regulation, problem-solving and metacognition. The first section of this literature review will analyse what learning styles are and how classroom tasks may be adapted to suit each VARK group and the second section will focus on the definition of metacognition and self-awareness.

#### **I. 1. Learning Styles – arguments for and against**

Learning styles refer to “the style or individual learning techniques that act with its environment, to process, interpret and obtain information, experiences and desirable skills” (Othman & Amiruddin, 2010:653). There are several models to approach learning styles that originated in Jung's work (1927) and developed by Fleming who designed the VARK test (Fleming, 1995). Theories of learning styles have had several defenders and opponents.

On the one hand Othman and Amiruddin's (2010) report that learning styles can to some extent improve students' motivation. Notwithstanding, they advocate that VARK learning styles aren't directly related to intelligence or skill but to the way

information is acquired and understood, as they can be observed as a specific method to acquire “knowledge, positive skills and attitude. As such, VARK learning styles can create a fascinating learning environment and stimulate students’ senses in learning” (Othman & Amiruddin, 2010:658). On the other hand Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer and Bjork (2009) suggest that, when asked, children are able to say how they prefer to learn and distinguish learning styles and learning preferences. Nevertheless they argue that although the literature is extensive, there is a lack of suitable methodology and empirical data to justify the application of learning styles in educational practice.

Despite the fact that the ‘learning styles’ theory has been debunked by several experts as a waste of time and resources (Civinini, 2017), the aim of this research is not to reduce a learner to a particular learning style but to bring awareness to learners’ strengths and shortcomings and to the skills they are most comfortable with and the ones they need to work on. As concluded by Shannon (2008:13) “teaching students metacognitive strategies is a valuable skill that helps students become more self-directed learners. Before the study, the majority of the students had never given any thought to ‘how they learn’ and what type of learning style they have. But now, these students are interested in trying the learning styles survey to help them ‘think about how they think’ ”.

### **I. 1.1. Differentiated tasks – Accommodating activities to learning styles**

English lessons are planned to contemplate skills, vocabulary, grammar structures and interaction patterns. Learners learn by using different skills and the best way to plan a lesson is by addressing all five senses because they trigger interest, motivation and focus. Furthermore, fostering self-awareness of learning styles and promoting reflection on how learners learn the best and what activities they might profit the most from is, from my point of view, not only a valuable resource for their present but also for their future as learners and potential teachers and educators because they gain autonomy and confidence in knowledge acquisition. After identifying learning styles, teachers can combine learning styles with appropriate teaching styles (Gilakjani, 2012.). In their study about differentiated instruction, Alavinia and Farhady (2012) concluded that differentiation is beneficial to teach vocabulary and also that it contributes to motivate learners and increase their autonomy and confidence levels.

Fleming and Baume (2006) underline that teachers must also reflect and become self-aware of a possible propensity to favour their own learning style in detriment of the

learners' learning styles, and further research has proven that learners may even have more than one learning style (Othman & Amiruddin, 2010). It is imperative to have multiple learning opportunities and strategies, and that is why differentiated tasks and skill based tasks are so important. Learning styles ought to accommodate the learners' natural abilities and needs, and at the same time expose them to other ways of learning as well. Boström cited in Boström and Lassen (2006)

(...) found positive connections between methods adapted to the students' individual learning style and their learning and motivation. Metacognition seems to be essential for ensuring that learning strategies may be matched with the individual's preferred learning style. Being able to recognise and evaluate one's learning style is a key means of reflecting on one's own thinking processes. (p. 186)

#### **I. 1.1.1 – Visual learners**

Visual learners prefer maps, charts, graphs, diagrams, brochures, flowcharts, highlighters, different colours, pictures, word pictures, written texts, different fonts, designs and different spatial arrangements (Othman and Amiruddin, 2010). Piping, as cited in Othman and Amiruddin (2010) states that visual learners usually have a rich imagination and are prone to be creative and imaginative and Gilakjani (2012) suggests that visual learners prefer to sit at the front of the classroom. Drago and Wagner cited in Othman and Amiruddin (2010), suggest that visual learners may be distracted by movement or actions but not by noise.

#### **I. 1.1.2 – Auditory learners**

Aural learners learn best through listening, discussing and talking. They like explaining ideas to others, discussing topics, using recordings, attending lectures and using stories and jokes, drama and music (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). Drago and Wagner, cited in Othman and Amiruddin (2010), advocate that aural learners may be easily disrupted by noise and thus might prefer to learn in quieter environments. Armstrong, also cited in Othman and Amiruddin (2010), states that aural learners are good readers and writers, good narrators, have good vocabulary and are strong foreign language learners.

#### **1.1.3 – Reading/Writing learners**

According to Othman and Amiruddin (2010), reading/writing learners learn best by interacting with texts and the written word. They prefer lists, essays, reports, textbooks, written feedback, definitions, printed handouts, readings, course books, Web

pages, multiple choice exercises and note taking procedures. They tend to be focused and to develop their own methods of learning (Othman and Amiruddin, 2010).

#### **1.1.4 – Kinaesthetic learners**

Othman and Amiruddin (2010) support the idea that kinaesthetic learners learn best by doing or experimenting and that they prefer real-life examples, demonstrations, roleplay, working models, field trips, trial and error, doing things to understand them, laboratories, hands-on approaches and using their senses. They use movement as an aid to retain information, thus total physical response tasks are particularly suitable for this group of learners. Othman and Amiruddin (2010) also suggest that kinaesthetic learners are defined by their ability to relate to more than one sensorial input at the same time and to be more energetic although they are commonly more passive in a teacher centred classroom environment. Gilakjani (2012) also suggests that these learners can easily become unfocused.

### **I. 2. Metacognition and learning to learn**

One of our goals as young learners' teachers is to provide each single child with learning opportunities and to stimulate them to think about learning to learn. Learning to learn is best developed in a classroom context that considers learning as an affective, emotional, personal and social process which requires face-to-face interaction (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015).

Metacognition denotes the awareness and monitoring of one's thoughts (Flavell, 1979) which is to say thinking about your thinking. In her study, Coutinho (2007:40) states that "students with good metacognition demonstrate good academic performance compared to students with poor metacognition. Students with poor metacognition may benefit from metacognitive training to improve their metacognition and academic performance" thus validating the importance of thinking about learning. It is within the field of metacognition that the concept of learning to learn, a metacognitive strategy, was based.

According to Ellis and Ibrahim (2015) learning to learn is intended to provide learners with explicit techniques of learning a language and to make them aware of what strategies they may resort to and how to use them as personal learning strategies. Learning to learn is a metacognitive strategy and also fosters learner autonomy, reflection skills, openness to different ideas, learning from mistakes and self-esteem,

regardless of the learner's age (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). Both Ellis and Ibrahim (2015) and Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou (2003) agree that young children are capable of developing their self-awareness. Furthermore it is an evolving process that will be beneficial in their future. Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou (2003:126) suggest that "learning-how-to-learn strategies can be developed from very early on and are especially important for young children, because they help them to form useful learning habits, and to become autonomous learners, thus benefiting every other area of their education". By realising that each child is unique and has more than one way of learning, we also acknowledge that learning styles may be used to focus on a particular ability while at the same time allowing the child to become more aware of learning strategies. According to Coffield as cited in Gilakjani (2012:108), "one of the most significant issues in learning to learn is an individual taking the responsibility for his/her own learning. The individuals should know what their own learning styles are and what characteristics this style has and they should thereby behave according to this style. ... When the learner takes the responsibility for his/her own learning, she/he attributes meaning to the process of learning". Therefore we can conclude that self-awareness and learning styles are intimately connected since the learner takes the central role in the learning process.

### **I. 2.1 Definition and advantages of raising self-awareness in young learners**

"Metacognitive awareness is an umbrella term" (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015:9) that encompasses several strands: self-awareness, language awareness, cognitive awareness, social awareness, and intercultural awareness. Raising self-awareness and knowing oneself is a way to reflect upon one's limits and expectations towards language learning. Self-awareness is the knowledge about oneself as a language learner; the awareness of one's learning differences and preferences; the formulation of realistic expectations towards language learning; the setting and meeting of personal goals (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015:10). Vrugt and Oort (2008:124) suggest that "self-regulated learning involves goal setting, metacognition and the use of (meta)cognitive strategies", i.e. methods used to help student understand how they learn. The formulation of realistic expectations is extremely important to maintain the level of motivation in language learning. Weaker learners tend to feel demotivated when they can't complete a task or fail to answer like all the others. Raising self-awareness allows learners to gain increased understanding of themselves as language learners and to increase their self-

esteem. Following specific activities focused on their learning styles and self-assessing their accomplishments following these plans will provide learners with a means to reflect that will enable them to make choices in their future autonomous study at home. Teacher guidance is of the essence in providing data to reflect upon and in fostering self-awareness.

### **I. 3. Summary**

As shown in the literature review, developing young learners' self-awareness of learning styles and learning to learn techniques are valuable assets to teaching English, promoting the development of metacognitive strategies and learner autonomy. As stated by Boström and Lassen (2006):

(...) teaching based on individual learning styles is an effective way to ensure students' achievement and motivation. Awareness of learning styles, it is argued, influences metacognition and choice of relevant learning strategies. Consciousness of own improvement provides students with new perspectives of their learning potential.

Exposing learners to tasks reflecting their learning styles may contribute to develop personal abilities and skills, but it is paramount that students realise they need to learn a language through all skills. Being self-aware of one's learning style helps to strengthen one's personal learning resources and to work on the skills we less favour as learners.

## **Chapter II Action Research**

### **II. 1. Context**

This study was conducted in a primary state school nearby Lisbon with a 4<sup>th</sup> form class of 25 students (13 boys 12 girls) of whom 4 boys were SEN students with SLDs, namely dyslexia and dysorthographia. Two of these students had no interest in being at school or learning English and struggled with reading and writing activities, refusing to collaborate during lessons and sometimes trying to grab the class's attention by swearing out aloud.

The students, two from Brazil, were all Portuguese native speakers, who were learning English as a foreign language. The students had prior contact with the English language in the 3<sup>rd</sup> form in the same primary school. They had two 60 minute English lessons a week on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Classroom behaviour was not always the

best since lessons took place at the end of the school day, from 16:30 to 17:30, and after a break. The playground was a small and enclosed space surrounded by thick glass windows. Children often had issues to solve during and after the break as well as at the beginning of the English lesson which often disturbed the first part of the lesson, cutting its productive time short.

The school was located in a lower middleclass district on the outskirts of Lisbon and so students are loaned the book by the school cluster. Teachers were not allowed to assign homework as this is part of the school cluster's philosophy and therefore homework tasks were eliminated from the planning stage. Even though students were encouraged to work voluntarily at home, most of them didn't and thus work during lessons was actually the only opportunity they had to explore and interact with the English language.

The course book with corresponding workbook adopted by the school cluster was *Seesaw 4* (Albuquerque & Marques, 2016b) as a follow up from their previous course book *Seesaw 3* (Albuquerque & Marques, 2016a) both of which were compliant with the *Metas Curriculares de Inglês de 1º Ciclo* (Bravo, Cravo & Duarte, 2015). This study complemented the topic "Conhecer-se a si e ao outro" ("knowing yourself and others") although none of the items within the program contemplate the development of self-awareness *per se*.

## **II. 2. Methodology**

Supported by the suggestions of Ellis & Ibrahim (2015) and Othman & Amiruddin, 2010, I developed my action research (AR) for a period of twelve weeks with a 4<sup>th</sup> form English class of 25 students while doing my supervised practicum as an English teacher trainee. According to Burns (2010), AR implies a reflective approach to a particular teaching/learning problem within the classroom context and a series of stages that contribute to the solution of the problem. That is achieved by following four stages: planning, action, observation and reflection (Burns, 2010:8). My research methodology was focused on a quantitative and qualitative approach to data collection. The planning stage (September) comprised of getting permission from the school board, parents and the students. The first action stage (end September) comprised of completion of a questionnaire on learning preferences. The second action stage (October to December) comprised of the elaboration of specific classroom tasks for each learning style group. Students then filled in a third questionnaire on the learning

styles tasks. The main outcome of this stage was project group work with oral presentations and ensuing reflection. Through all the stages my teaching journal focused on registering the students' reactions to the questionnaires, to the tasks given and their reflection on learning styles and language learning skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) as well as their reaction to raising their self-awareness.

### **II. 2. 1. Ethical concerns**

To ensure an ethical approach to this study, consent forms were issued to the school cluster's director and to the parents (Appendix A). The students were informed about the objectives of this study and that their identities wouldn't be disclosed. In order to make them feel comfortable and at ease I chose to appeal to their self-esteem, telling them they had been chosen to participate in the study and that this was an opportunity for them to know themselves as learners. The students' reaction was quite positive and they filled in their consent forms (Appendix B) and chose their 'pretend names'. The consent forms were inspired by Cravo (2017) and they were concise, direct and fun, from my point of view.

### **II. 2. 2. The first questionnaire**

The first questionnaire (Appendix C) was distributed at the beginning of October and was intended to survey my students' preferences concerning learning English. Pashler et al., (2009) defend that learning preferences may diverge from learning styles. I thought it would be an appropriate way to develop my students' self-awareness to start reflecting about the differences between personal tastes and personal abilities, the subject of this study. The questionnaire was comprised of closed questions the aim of which was to understand what types of activities students preferred so as to adapt the classroom tasks accordingly. The outcomes were expressed in percentages and shared with the class followed by a reflection through open class questioning.

### **II. 2. 3. The second questionnaire: the VARK questionnaire for young learners**

For this particular study, I focused on learning from a sensory point of view, based on the five senses, adopting the VARK questionnaire for young learners (based on Fleming (1995), which was adapted, translated and distributed also in early October with the aim of defining my students' learning styles (Appendix D).

The results were presented as a percentage and displayed in a bar chart in the classroom. The display was intended to raise self-awareness of the several ways we can learn and to promote a more inclusive environment in the classroom with the motto “We all learn differently, but we learn all the same”. The display was followed by an open class discussion to help the students reflect upon their differences and similarities as learners and to encourage them to realise that language learning comprises all of the VARK learning styles. Furthermore, the VARK learning styles model allowed me to explore and reflect upon the activities related to each learning style.

#### **II. 2. 4. Visual Aids**

Visual aids (Appendix E) were used on a daily basis to promote reflection and association between learning styles and activities: students related the eye to visual activities, the ear to aural activities, the book to reading/writing activities and the hand to kinaesthetic activities. The visual aids were often used as transitions between lesson activities and were intended to promote simultaneously anticipation of the following activity and a tool for reflection on the learning styles comprised in that particular activity. By comparing the different types of activities, students were invited to think about how they learn when they are already aware of their learning styles. Comments and reactions were also registered in my teaching journal.

#### **II. 2. 5. Teaching journal and weekly reflections**

Over this trimester qualitative data was collected both from my journal entries and my weekly reflections for the tutoring seminar for the practicum to cultivate my own self-awareness as a teacher and to register my students’ opinions and reflections on the activities proposed during the lessons and their outcomes. Journal entries were used to register students’ opinions and reflections that commonly occurred at the end of a particular activity or at the end of the lesson through open class questioning. Journal entries followed the model provided by Leslie (2017) and were written after the lessons in form of short texts or bullet points and are presented either as tables or as quotations in the results. Weekly reflections concerned my own work as a teacher both in terms of planning the development of the students’ self-awareness and the outcome of my planning related to learning styles.

## **II. 2. 6. Project lesson – Differentiated tasks**

In order to confront students with their own learning style and to study the efficiency of instruction based on learning styles, project work was conceived in mid-November focusing on learning vocabulary related to school places and objects. In the first project stage the class was divided in 4 groups according to the VARK acronym and each group brainstormed the types of activities able to fit their learning style group and how each of the activities helped them to learn English. In the second stage, each group received an envelope with tailored tasks (Appendix F) concerning the topic of school objects and school places. Visual learners were given the task of organising a picture dictionary poster in which they either had to draw objects and school places or label the pictures given (Appendix G). Aural learners were given a listening exercise in which they had to fill in a worksheet and then record themselves pronouncing the words given (Appendix H). Reading/Writing learners were given a reading comprehension text and a fill in the gaps exercise (Appendix I). Furthermore they had to label school objects and spaces mentioned in the text. Kinesthetic learners were given the task of creating models out of milk cartons to create places in the school and decorate them with school objects. The project itself was done in one lesson and the outcome was presented in the following lesson with ensuing open class discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of using learning styles as learning tools. The outcome was exhibited in the classroom (Appendix L). The posters were placed on the wall and the results of the reflection were registered in my teaching journal. This tool validated the importance of task differentiation and syllabus adaptation as disclosed in my teaching journal.

## **II. 2. 7. The third questionnaire**

The third questionnaire (Appendix J) was distributed at the end of November with the aim of assessing the effectiveness and appeal of learning style instruction among the students bearing in mind the project work previously done and the tasks used during the term. This questionnaire contained reversed questions so as to reduce response bias, monitor students' attention and their ability to deal with contradictions (e.g. "*Makes me concentrate*" vs "*distracts me*"). Being able to deal with contradictory questions reveals by itself the ability to reflect and therefore the awareness of oneself as a learner. The outcomes were expressed as a percentage and discussed with the class. This tool provided deeper insight to the degree of self-awareness development and

ensuing reflection through open class questioning about the results which highlighted the importance of self-awareness of learning styles and of learning to learn as advocated by Ellis and Ibrahim (2015).

### **II. 3. Results**

As previously mentioned the aim of this study was to further understand the concepts of the metacognitive strand self-awareness and learning to learn, and to determine if the awareness of learning styles may benefit language learning. Thus the following research questions were formulated:

- How can learning to learn and raising self-awareness of learning styles contribute to language learning?
- What activities might suit each VARK group in class?

This section of my report aims to present and analyse the results of my action research tools as featured in the methodology section: initial observations and considerations, the first questionnaire, the VARK questionnaire for young learners, the use of visual aids, a teaching journal and weekly reflections, project work with differentiated tasks and finally the third questionnaire. These tools provided me with quantitative and qualitative data to reflect upon the efficiency and adequacy of implementing the learning styles theory in the language learning classroom, and the development of self-awareness in both myself, through constant reflective teaching, and my students.

#### **II. 3. 1. Initial observations and considerations**

Over this trimester, qualitative data was collected both from my journal entries and also my weekly reflections. Both research tools provided deeper insight concerning the choice of activities related to learning styles and simultaneously allowed a clearer view on the development of my students' self-awareness through their reflections, comments and ideas.

During the first lessons I observed students' reactions to the several stages of the lessons, their interaction patterns, the attention given to different types of activities proposed and their willingness to reflect upon what they were doing and learning.

Initially this class seemed particularly demanding, mostly due to their behaviour during lessons. These students lacked focus and their concentration was poor whenever

one of them started to reveal less interest in what was going on. Because they always sat in groups of four, maintaining eye-contact with all the students at the same time was sometimes difficult, especially when moving around the classroom.

| <b>Date: 26th September 2017</b>   |  |
|--|--|
| Teacher's feelings:<br>Hopeful / excited<br>Frustrated /worried  | This was the 2 <sup>nd</sup> lesson observed and the 1st I mentioned my project. I felt excited to present my action research plan and tried to captivate them but soon it became obvious they were thrilled in participating but not so much in learning English. |
| Teacher's expectations of students:<br>Reaction to project<br>Eagerness to participate<br>Reflection ability | I had high expectations for this class, particularly because most of them showed interest in the project; notwithstanding they revealed no reflection habits and their behaviour was very inconsistent.  |
| Students' attitudes:<br>Towards the project<br>Towards English   | Students were very attentive as I explained the AR plan but were less attentive during the lesson. 25% of the class pays no attention and doesn't follow instructions.   |

(Teaching Journal, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2017)

This journal entry depicts the lesson when I described my study to the class. Although they showed great interest in the project, learning English was not the most important issue for them. Some of them made funny faces during lessons so as to distract their colleagues and some had a negative emotional response to English lessons, particularly the SEN students. Notwithstanding, these early observations enabled me to contrast their initial reactions to the results of the first questionnaire which focused on learning preferences.

One of the aims of this study was to develop self-awareness of learning styles. Classroom management was a major concern particularly during the first month of lessons. The time spent in establishing routines and rules delayed the process of developing the students' self-awareness as shown in this weekly reflection from 11<sup>th</sup> October: *"Managing this particular class is not an easy task. They aren't used to concentrating and to doing individual work and that is probably because they sit in groups of 4. The fact that lessons take place at the end of the day and after the only break they have in the afternoon also makes it difficult for them to focus because they do tend to have conflicts during break"*. Having a serene classroom environment




encourages reflection and open class discussion and this was only accomplished later on.

### II. 3. 2. The first questionnaire

The first questionnaire (Appendix C) was distributed as a preliminary step that enabled me to understand my students' preferences concerning activities and interaction patterns in English lessons before assessing their learning styles. The main aim was to contrast preferences with learning styles and to raise my students' self-awareness by allowing them to better know themselves as learners.

Table 1 reveals that overall this class enjoyed learning English (95%) and English lessons (90%) differing from my early observations. Concerning preference of activities, the students' favoured watching videos (100%) and drawing (91%), which are within the domain of visual activities. The students also revealed a great appreciation for games and tasks (95%) and roleplay (82%) which are kinaesthetic activities that involve movement. Contrary to my expectations and since learning English at a young age depends highly on oral interaction, only 60% to 70% of the class showed a preference for listening and speaking activities such as listening to stories (77%), the teacher's explanations (73%) or speaking with classmates (68%). From my point of view, this class spent a lot of time listening to their teacher having little room to interact with each other as pairs because their class display focused more on group work. Apart from that, listening to stories is sometimes forgotten in primary instruction, mostly because literacy acquisition is mainly fostered by reading stories.

**Table 1** – First Questionnaire (results expressed in percentages and number of students N= 22)

| I like...                                  | <br>Yes | <br>No | <br>Don't know |
|--|--|---|---|
| learning English                           | 95% (21)   | 5% (1)  | 0%  |
| my English lessons                         | 90% (20)   | 5% (1)  | 5% (1)  |
| singing English songs                      | 82% (18)   | 9% (2)  | 9% (2)  |
| doing games and tasks in English           | 95% (21)   | 5% (1)  | 0%  |
| listening to my teacher's explanations     | 73% (16)   | 9% (2)  | 18% (4)   |
| reading English books                      | 59% (13)   | 23% (5)   | 18% (4)   |
| watching videos in English                 | 100% (22)  | 0%  | 0%  |
| dancing and doing movements during lessons | 77% (17)   | 18% (4)   | 5% (1)  |

|  |          |          |        |
|--|----------|----------|--------|
| listening to stories                   | 77% (17) | 14% (3)  | 9% (2) |
| speaking with my classmates in English | 68% (15) | 23% (5)  | 9% (2) |
| acting out dialogues (roleplay)        | 82% (18) | 13% (3)  | 5% (1) |
| writing lists of word                  | 55% (12) | 36% (8)  | 9% (2) |
| illustrating and colouring new words   | 91% (20) | 0%       | 9% (2) |
| working alone                          | 36% (8)  | 55% (12) | 9% (2) |
| working in pairs                       | 91% (20) | 0%       | 9% (2) |
| working in groups                      | 95% (21) | 5% (1)   | 0%     |

Reading and writing activities were the least favoured amongst the students. Only 59% of the class enjoyed reading books in English and only 55% enjoyed writing lists of words. This might be related to the fact that reading and writing activities are more common in their daily lives as students and, when asked why they didn't appreciate reading and writing in English, most of them said "*isso é o que fazemos todos os dias com a nossa professora*" ["that is what we do every day with our teacher"] (teaching journal, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2017). This lack of interest in reading and writing was constant throughout the research. Open class discussion encouraged students to reflect on the pertinence of reading and writing while learning a foreign language but developing that awareness was slow-paced as shown in my weekly reflection from 24<sup>th</sup> October: "*the assessment worksheet really opened their eyes to a reality they weren't really aware of despite all advice. Hopefully they will become aware that their level of commitment is related to their eventual success*". As the school cluster did not allow homework, individual worksheets or workbook activities were always done in class, inhibiting the practice of writing alone outside the context of the classroom. Homework is vital to consolidate and revise, but this class felt no responsibility for their individual English development. Despite this fact, some students felt the need to ask me for additional work to practice at home particularly after the first written assessment task which revealed a deeper level of self-awareness.

The working pattern they disliked the most was working alone (55%) and the most favoured was group work (95%). Group work was probably favoured because students always sat in groups of four in the classroom and that preference was clear during the entire period of my research as the following quote demonstrates: "*They interact very well as a group and feel discouraged when working alone*" (weekly reflection, 11<sup>th</sup> October). When asked about their preferences, some students associated individual work to testing and therefore to some stress related moments. Nevertheless

after a brief open class discussion about the advantages of all working patterns, some of the students realised the benefits of working alone, namely time management and the promotion of self-confidence.

Students were also asked if they thought their preferences were the same as their learning styles. The majority assumed they were. A small group of students however disagreed as they identified with all the activities featured in the questionnaire and therefore were not sure of their own learning style. It is noteworthy that the small group previously mentioned was composed of strong students in all school subjects, which from my point of view was indicative of a greater level of self-awareness.

### II. 3. 3. The VARK questionnaire for young learners

The VARK questionnaire for young learners was adapted and translated from the original online questionnaire (2017). A class bar graph displayed the results of the test and was integrated in the classroom’s English Corner (Appendix K).

As shown in Table 2, the majority of the class (33%) learned by doing (kinaesthetic), 25% learned by listening (aural), 25% by reading or writing and only 17% of the class learned by seeing (visual). When comparing these results with the first questionnaire, in which visual activities were preferred by the majority of the class, it is clearly demonstrated that learning preferences and learning styles differ, hence the pertinence of applying both questionnaires when dealing with learning styles and task types.

**Table 2** – VARK Questionnaire Results ( presented in percentages and number of students out of 24 participants)

|              | Girls   | Boys    | Total   |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Visual       | 0% (0)  | 17% (4) | 17% (4) |
| Aural        | 17% (4) | 8% (2)  | 25% (6) |
| Read / Write | 4% (1)  | 21% (5) | 25% (6) |
| Kinaesthetic | 25% (6) | 8% (2)  | 33% (8) |

Critically analysing this particular research tool and despite the fact that each student had a concrete result for the learning style, some of the alleged kinaesthetic learners were in fact multimodal as their results were similar in two or three learning

styles. They were classified as kinaesthetic because that was their best result, but in some cases the difference between reading/writing or aural results and kinaesthetic results was only one or two points. One of the main reasons for this was a particular question concerning field trips. None of the students chose a different option in this question, revealing, from my point of view, their preference and not expressing *ipso facto* how they learn the best. This simple question may have manipulated the final results for the VARK questionnaire which is something I would take into consideration when applying this questionnaire in the future. Another possible reason for the results is gender related: 25% of the 33% kinaesthetic students were girls. Being a language class, boys did not relate to the types of activities proposed by the “hands-on-approach” and therefore focused on other styles. When asked, girls associated kinaesthetic activities with building models, picture frames, making origami, roleplay, etc. If I were to distribute the questionnaire again I would leave out field trips as a possible answer as it induces an answer by preference rather than by learning style. The length of the questionnaire would also be reformulated in a future approach. For young learners with less ability to concentrate for long periods of time, this questionnaire might have been too long and children might have been tempted to answer without thinking just to get the task done.

### **II. 3. 4. Visual Aids**

As previously mentioned, visual aids (Appendix E) were used on a daily basis to promote reflection and association of skills with learning styles. Even though it was a qualitative tool, it helped students relate different types of activities with their own learning styles. Each time a visual aid was presented on the board I would ask: *what learning styles are we focusing on in this next activity?/What learning style have we focused on just now?* and students easily associated the ear visual aid with listening activities and the aural learning style; the eye with flashcard activities and the visual learning style; the book with reading comprehension or writing activities and the reading/writing learning style; and the hand with TPR activities or arts and crafts and the kinaesthetic learning style. Visual aids validated the development of self-awareness since *“students reacted immediately to the visual input and revealed a predisposition to participate attentively in the activities related to their learning style”* (Teaching journal, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2017). Students were nonetheless encouraged to be aware of all their senses in language learning and recognised the advantages of learning through all skills.

### II. 3. 5. Reflection on learning styles

During the course of my research, different activities were implemented to cover all the language learning styles in each lesson. That was made visible through the already mentioned visual aids and also through open class discussion at the end of each lesson when simple questions were asked:

- *Can you remember what we did today?*
- *Did we speak / listen today?*
- *Did we read / write in English today?*
- *Did we play a game / sing a song?*
- *What vocabulary did you learn?*
- *Was it difficult?*
- *Was it fun?*

Gradually students became more and more aware of their learning styles and tried to assess if they learnt better using their learning style or not. This weekly reflection from 6<sup>th</sup> November states this particular concern of covering all the learning styles in each lesson and the impact it had on students: *“The activities were focused on covering all the learning styles and to allow as much oral interaction as possible, namely through pair work which seems to be a favourite interaction mode for this particular class. The students were engaged throughout the lesson and spoke mainly English. They reacted well to all the steps of the lesson and followed voice level and visual aids (listen/look/speak) rules”*. The development of self-awareness was slow and progressive and students were encouraged to consider all styles of learning as important for that development. Simultaneously, they were also encouraged to try to benefit the most from the tasks that related to their learning style. That was accomplished by means of a small group activity. Students were divided into four learning style groups. They were asked to think about activities related to their own learning style.

**Table 3** – Activities proposed by students

| <b>Visual</b>        | <b>Aural</b>                | <b>Read / Write</b>                   | <b>Kinaesthetic</b>                |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 4 students           | 6 students                  | 6 students                            | 8 students                         |
| Mimes<br>Board games | Listening to the<br>teacher | Reading instructions<br>Writing texts | Shaping origamis<br>Making picture |

|                 |                                 |                 |                  |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Computer games  | Listening to someone explaining | Reading posters | frames           |
| Puzzles         |                                 | Writing stories | Using puppets    |
| Watching videos | Listening to others' opinions   | Crosswords      | Using play dough |
| Posters         |                                 | Word search     | Roleplay         |
| Gestures        | Songs                           |                 | Gestures         |
|                 | Pair work                       |                 |                  |
|                 | Repeating words aloud           |                 |                  |

As shown in table 3 students were able to associate learning styles and activities. They presented their findings to the class and interestingly some groups thought some activities were related to their learning style (e.g. visual and kinaesthetic learners chose mimes as one of their activities). After all presentations were finished I challenged the students with the question: *E se uma única actividade puder abranger mais do que um estilo de aprendizagem?* [What if one single activity could cover more than one learning style?]. This question led us to associate all learning styles together and to determine whether more than one group could benefit from each of the options. The result is shown in table 4 and lists the activities they thought could relate to more than one learning style:

**Table 4** – End-result of the open class discussion about activities and learning styles

| Task typology   | Learning style   |
|-----------------|--|
| Mimes           | Visual, kinaesthetic                                   |
| Puzzles         | Visual, kinaesthetic                                   |
| Watching videos | Visual, aural, reading / writing                       |
| Posters         | Visual, reading / writing                              |
| Gestures        | Visual, kinaesthetic                                   |
| Songs           | Aural, reading / writing, kinaesthetic (with gestures) |
| Pair work       | Aural, reading / writing                               |
| Crosswords      | Reading / writing, visual                              |
| Word search     | Reading / writing, visual                              |
| Roleplay        | Kinaesthetic, aural, reading / writing, visual         |

The aim of this reflection was simultaneously to encourage students to see learning styles as an open option and not a dogma and also to show the importance of

knowing oneself as a learner. Being aware of one's learning style may be an asset as long as one does not dismiss all the other ways of learning. Being a foreign language teacher, it was paramount to demonstrate to my students that all learning styles are vital to learn English and to make a clear distinction between what may serve as an asset (in this case, knowing how you learn the best) and the danger of disregarding what is less preferred, especially because learning a foreign language encompasses all the language learning skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, acting, singing, etc. Students were asked to think about one of their lessons and the types of activities featured in the English lessons associating them with the visual aids usually displayed on the board. The outcome was consensual: during an English lesson there are visual, aural, reading/writing and kinaesthetic activities therefore we could only conclude that valuing all learning styles is imperative for language learning. This reflection was also vital for the subsequent project work which was planned to provide the students with differentiated classroom activities focused on learning styles alone.

### **II. 3. 6. Project Lesson**

Having a lesson with four groups engaged in different activities was challenging in terms of planning and concretisation. Tasks were designed according to the VARK learning styles and reflection as a means to raise metacognition (Cravo, 2017) and self-awareness of the several skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) was used during the lesson to develop students' self-awareness of their learning styles and the learning styles of others. The lesson was organised to simulate a game, each group receiving a closed envelope with the tasks appointed. The ludic approach was important in developing anticipation and excitement although students may have felt they were competing against each other in the beginning. Healthy competition is endorsed when beneficial but this was neither the objective nor my intention. This issue was addressed during the lesson and groups even got the chance to cooperate.

Group work was designed so as to find out whether students felt more comfortable learning using their own learning styles or not. Unfortunately not all tasks were accomplished with the same degree of accuracy and efficiency. The aural tasks were suitable. Aural learners had more support from me in the beginning of the lesson mainly because of the recordings. Kinaesthetic learners were less supported by my scaffolding since they had a more physical approach to learning. Critically analysing

that lesson, I think they were totally focused on getting the physical part of the project done but not really in retaining the new vocabulary. Visual learners had a wall dictionary to draw items that were labelled or to label pictures that were featured. This group had more vocabulary to address during the task and started to feel nervous when they realised other groups had already finished their tasks. Reading/Writing learners were responsible for a fill in the gaps exercise and for writing a text according to the model presented. Critically observing all the tasks, and according to my weekly reflection from 14<sup>th</sup> November: *“Aural activities were suitable both in time and style. This was the most successful group and I can’t help to think that my own learning style may have conditioned the elaboration of these materials and activities. Maybe it was very easy for me to accomplish this part because I’m aural as well. Visual activities were suitable but in retrospect I would have done a puzzle with words and visuals cut-outs for them to glue in the correct place. That would have saved time and would prevent the colouring stage. That would also have been more suitable because that way the activity would have been only visual. Reading/Writing activities were not suited for their level of English. A shorter and simpler fill in the gaps exercise would be preferable and then subsequent the writing of a text with words in a box to use. Kinaesthetic activities were the most time consuming. As expected they focused on making things pretty instead of functional. Perhaps a small role play with realia would have been more suitable than models but I wanted to follow their suggestions from the previous reflections. A lesson learnt here – we should follow students’ choices but consider the final outcome first. Confusing and tiring as it may have been it is something that I will continue to do in my teaching practice, with the changes mentioned above”*.

The following lesson, students were able to share their tasks with their colleagues and to take part in a subsequent open class reflection on the effectiveness of the project. The majority of the class felt the experience had been enjoyable and fun but not all agreed on the efficiency of the lesson itself as some found it confusing and loud. When asked about using learning styles in other fields of knowledge, most answered they could use them in other subjects and even in their own personal talents outside the school environment: *“Podemos usar os estilos de aprendizagem para português, matemática e estudo do meio, para cantar melhor, aprender mais coisas, ficar mais atentos a como aprendemos melhor”* [“we can use learning styles for Portuguese,



*Mathematics, Social Studies, to sing better, to learn more things, to pay attention as to how we learn better”]* (teaching journal, 21<sup>st</sup> November). Notwithstanding my critical view on the project work approach, this tool enabled me to develop my own self-awareness as a teacher and my students’ self-awareness of their learning styles and their overall efficiency.

Whilst this lesson may have been the more visible facet of differentiated tasks, lessons were always planned to cover all learning styles. The students’ reactions to the different tasks were always recorded in my teaching journal and also in my weekly reflections. This enabled me to gain a broader perspective on my students’ needs and accomplishments in each activity. An example of this constant reflection on my own planning and choice of activities is visible through this weekly reflection from 22<sup>nd</sup> November concerning story books and storytelling: *“It was particularly interesting to contrast all the learning style groups handling the story. Aural learners were more able to retain vocabulary from the story and were very successful in retaining information. On the other hand, Readers/Writers were already familiar with some of the vocabulary and were also able to participate easily. The other two groups revealed more difficulties in handling the vocabulary”*. Insights were always shared with the class in the form of questions (e. g. *Why do you think this is an aural activity?*) as a means to promote their reflection.

### II. 3. 7. The third questionnaire

The third questionnaire (Appendix J) was distributed at the end of November with the aim of assessing both the project work and the development of my students’ self-awareness.

**Table 5** – Questionnaire 3 (results featured in percentages and number of students out of 22 answers)

| Working with my learning style:      |  |       |  |       | No answer |      |
|--------------------------------------|--|-------|---|-------|-----------|------|
|                                      | %  | N. S. | %   | N. S. | %         | N.S. |
| Helps me to learn vocabulary         | 91%  | 20    | 9%  | 2     | -         |      |
| Is fun                               | 86%  | 19    | 14%   | 3     | -         |      |
| Builds my self-confidence in English | 82%  | 18    | 18%   | 4     | -         |      |
| Makes me concentrate                 | 59%  | 13    | 41%   | 9     | -         |      |
| Helps me to know myself as a student | 73%  | 16    | 22%   | 5     | 5%        | 1    |

|   |     |    |     |    |    |   |
|---|-----|----|-----|----|----|---|
| Makes learning easier                                 | 73% | 16 | 22% | 5  | 5% | 1 |
| Helps me to realise the way others learn              | 77% | 17 | 23% | 5  | -  |   |
| Distracts me  | 32% | 7  | 68% | 15 | -  |   |
| Helps me to learn just like I learn with other styles | 73% | 16 | 18% | 4  | 9% | 2 |
| Does not contribute to my learning                    | 22% | 5  | 73% | 16 | 5% | 1 |
| Is boring   | 27% | 6  | 73% | 16 | -  |   |
| Helps me to know my strengths                         | 64% | 14 | 31% | 7  | 5% | 1 |
| Helps me to know my shortcomings                      | 55% | 12 | 41% | 9  | 5% | 1 |
| Provides strategies to learn better                   | 86% | 19 | 14% | 3  | -  |   |

As shown in table 5, the majority of the students considered working with their learning style as being: helpful for learning vocabulary, fun, a good way to build confidence in learning English and a means of providing them with learning strategies. This indicates that students recognised the benefits of being aware of their learning styles. On the other hand, approximately 30% of the class found it distracting and boring. In fact, 41% of the students felt learning styles did not help them concentrate. These results may have been based on the project work experience alone for the lessons were noisier than usual and totally student centred meaning the students lacked the scaffolding they were used to in regular lessons. Interestingly this result might also have been conditioned by the SEN students in the class. Two of them were classified as read/write learners and have dyslexia which could prove that one's learning style assessment might not contemplate all nuances involved in defining a learner type. For these two, project work was in fact boring because writing was their least favoured activity. More than 70% of the students considered working with learning styles beneficial in recognising the way others learn and developing self-awareness of the ways they learn. Based on these results, students recognised the benefits of working with their learning styles which indicated that self-awareness was increased.

## **II. 4. Discussion and conclusion**

### **II. 4. 1. Summary of research questions and findings**

*“How can learning to learn and raising self-awareness of learning styles contribute to language learning?”* and *“What activities may suit each VARK group in class?”* were the two focal research questions that were addressed in this action research. The work was developed with a group of 25 students from the 4<sup>th</sup> form with the aim of raising their self-awareness as learners and teaching them to learn how to

learn. It was conducted during my practicum over a three-month period. The set of research tools chosen for this study entailed three questionnaires, my teaching journal and my weekly reflections for the SO PES2, project work and the setting of differentiated tasks.

Results have led me to conclude that young learners are able to express preferences and to understand the difference between learning preferences and learning styles. Through constant reflection on both, students' self-awareness increased and they became more aware of who they were as learners. Contrary to Cravo's (2017) findings, I believe that self-awareness and cognitive awareness are developed simultaneously for it is impossible to know who one is as a learner without knowing why and how one learns.

The greatest limitation to this action research was time. Research on learning styles, metacognition and differentiated tasks should cover a full school year period and not a trimester. Despite the fact that Cravo (2017) pointed out time as one of the limitations for her work I persisted on the theme, for it was personal and dear to me. Action research aims to identify a problem in a specific class and to develop research and I felt I had hardly any time to get to know my class before implementing my action research. Even though my research was not as profound as I intended, I believe it was successful in raising my students' self-awareness of learning styles.

#### **II. 4. 2. The significance of this action research in my own professional development**

This action research has led me to develop ideas based on the literature I reviewed and to question my own thoughts and ideas about learning styles and learning to learn. As a teacher, this study helped me realise my own shortcomings in adapting certain tasks to my students' learning styles. I felt the need to monitor myself constantly and to critically analyse all my options sometimes even changing my mind after a decision and reassessing them all over again. Differentiated learning activities, for instance, is something that I will always encourage but with thorough planning. It also enabled me to think as a child and not as an adult. Constant reflection on my actions has made me consider the students' point of view primarily and to adjust their point of view with an adult course of action. During this research I felt the weight of responsibility in passing on certain notions and concepts that hopefully will endure and will help my students become stronger and more critical thinkers. The students revealed the ability to reflect and develop their own self-awareness throughout the process and I feel they

accomplished the purpose of this action research which was mainly to develop self-awareness of learning styles and to develop an emotional attachment to learning English.

### **II. 4. 3. Conclusion**

Hopefully this study has proven that children are able to differentiate learning preferences from learning styles and that it has helped my students to understand *who* they are as learners. Furthermore it has also proven that children are able to develop self-awareness and also that they were able to relate skills and activities to their own learning styles. Even though learning styles are appreciated by some researchers such as Boström and Lassen (2006) and Othman and Amiruddin (2010) and disregarded by others such as Pashler et al. (2009) and Civini (2017), I think that it is time well spent for it is a foundation for students' future as learners not only of a foreign language but in general. As shown in this study, evidence could be collected in terms of the development of self-awareness in general and of learning styles in particular. That awareness has helped my students to get to know themselves better as learners and as individuals. Having the opportunity to validate my own opinions on this subject has contributed to my own self-awareness and self-esteem as a teacher who is deeply concerned not only with teaching English but also with helping empower the adults of tomorrow.

As Boström and Lassen (2006:186) stated, "to empower students towards life-long learning, it seems essential to empower teachers with feasible and effective methodological approaches. Developing teachers' knowledge of learning styles and learning strategies is a key means by which this can be achieved". Hopefully this study will allow future researchers to gain a better perspective on the development of self-awareness of learning styles and the potential of reflective teaching and learning.

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## Appendix A

### PEDIDO DE AUTORIZAÇÃO AOS ENCARREGADOS DE EDUCAÇÃO

Caros pais e encarregados de educação,

O meu nome é Vanessa Nunes e iniciei em Setembro do corrente ano o meu estágio em ensino com o seu educando. No âmbito de um relatório final de estágio de Mestrado em ensino de inglês no 1º ciclo na Universidade Nova intitulado *Learning to learn – using self-awareness of learning styles to promote language learning* (Aprender a aprender – usar a autoconsciência de estilos de aprendizagem para promover a aprendizagem linguística).

Venho por este meio, solicitar a autorização para poder incluir o seu educando neste estudo.

O estudo decorrerá entre Outubro de 2017 e Dezembro do mesmo ano, envolvendo uma intervenção de crianças da seguinte forma: como objeto de observação, a recolha de dados será efetuada mediante a realização de teste VARK (testes que verificam o estilo de aprendizagem preferencial de cada indivíduo), questionários sobre as suas preferências de aprendizagem, questionários sobre as actividades que facilitam a aprendizagem dentro de cada grupo (visual, auditivo, leitura/escrita, cinestésico) e, ainda, autoavaliação e reflexão sobre a especificidade de cada aluno como aprendiz., podendo as mesmas deixar de participar em qualquer momento se assim o entenderem.

A informação recolhida fará parte do relatório final de estágio de mestrado em ensino, sendo os resultados obtidos divulgados no respectivo relatório. A instituição e os alunos permanecerão anónimos em qualquer circunstância.

Agradeço que até ao dia 4 de outubro de 2017 me conceda a autorização para proceder à implementação do estudo em causa, permitindo que o seu educando faça parte do estudo.

Vanessa Nunes

Professora Doutora Carolyn Leslie

Orientadora de Estágio

FCSH, Universidade Nova Lisboa





Eu, \_\_\_\_\_, encarregado de educação de \_\_\_\_\_

declaro que fui informado(a) dos objectivos do estudo intitulado *Learning to learn – using self-awareness of learning styles to promote language learning* (Aprender a aprender – usar a autoconsciência de estilos de aprendizagem para promover a aprendizagem linguística) e autorizo o meu educando a participar no estudo.

## Appendix B



### Autorização do/a aluno/a para o estudo da Vanessa:

*Learning to learn – using self-awareness of learning styles to promote language learning*

(Aprender a aprender – usar a autoconsciência de estilos de aprendizagem para promover a aprendizagem linguística)

**Isto quer dizer que a Vanessa quer ajudar-te a descobrir de que maneira aprendes melhor inglês e que atividades podem facilitar a tua aprendizagem.**

Pinta

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| A Vanessa explicou-me que está a fazer um estágio de Outubro a Dezembro na universidade para ser uma professora melhor. |  |  |
| A Vanessa explicou-me que eu posso ajudá-la no seu estudo para a universidade.  |  |  |
| A Vanessa explicou-me que quer que eu perceba como eu aprendo melhor inglês – a olhar, a ouvir, a ler ou a fazer.       |  |  |
| A Vanessa explicou-me que todos aprendemos de maneira diferente e que uma não é melhor nem pior do que a outra.         |  |  |
| A Vanessa explicou-me que existem atividades diferentes que facilitam a minha aprendizagem.                             |  |  |
| A Vanessa explicou-me é importante aprender a aprender.   |  |  |
| A Vanessa explicou-me que a minha opinião vai ser importante no estudo dela.  |  |  |
| A Vanessa explicou-me que vai mostrar o seu estudo a pessoas que também estudam sobre ensinar inglês a crianças.        |  |  |
| A Vanessa explicou-me que não vai mostrar o meu nome verdadeiro e que eu tenho que escolher um nome a fingir.           |  |  |
| A Vanessa explicou-me que eu posso deixar de participar a qualquer momento, se assim o quiser.                          |  |  |
| A Vanessa explicou-me que os meus pais sabem acerca do estudo da Vanessa.   |  |  |

Eu aceito participar

Eu não aceito participar

Como a Vanessa não vai usar o meu nome verdadeiro, eu vou escolher outro nome para o estudo.

O meu nome para o estudo é: \_\_\_\_\_

(posso escolher o nome de: um animal, um herói, uma princesa, uma cor, ou uma flor)

Assinatura do aluno: \_\_\_\_\_

Data: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you! Obrigada!




Adaptado de:

Cravo, P. K. (2017). *Reflection as a Means to Develop Young Learners' Metacognition*. Retrieved from RUN Repositório Universidade Nova (AAT 10362/21826)



## Appendix C

### Questionnaire 1 - English learning

| I like...                                  |  |  |  |
|--|---|--|---|
| learning English                           |   |  |   |
| my English lessons                         |   |  |   |
| singing English songs                      |   |  |   |
| doing games and tasks in English           |   |  |   |
| listening to my teacher's explanations     |   |  |   |
| reading English books                      |   |  |   |
| watching videos in English                 |   |  |   |
| dancing and doing movements during lessons |   |  |   |
| listening to stories                       |   |  |   |
| speaking with my classmates in English     |   |  |   |
| acting out dialogues (roleplay)            |   |  |   |
| writing lists of words                     |   |  |   |
| illustrating and colouring new words       |   |  |   |
| working alone                              |   |  |   |
| working in pairs                           |   |  |   |
| working in groups                          |   |  |   |

Your pretend name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_





## Appendix D



### VARK for young learners

#### How Do I Learn Best? Como aprendo melhor?

VARK Questionnaire version 7.1

<http://vark-learn.com/the-vark-questionnaire/the-vark-questionnaire-for-younger-people/>

**Escolhe a resposta que explica a tua preferência. Podes escolher mais do que uma hipótese em cada pergunta. Também podes deixar a pergunta em branco, se achares melhor.**

**Quando queres perceber se te saíste bem numa competição ou num teste, gostas que te seja explicado:**

- usando exemplos de coisas que tu fizeste
- vindo de alguém que tivesse falado contigo sobre isso usando gráficos
- que expliquem o que tu conseguiste fazer.
- usando uma descrição escrita ou uma tabela que apresente os teus resultados

**Vais montar legos novos. O que fazes primeiro:**

- ler as instruções que vêm na caixa
- tirar tudo da caixa e começar a montar as peças seguir os
- diagramas que mostram como se monta tudo
- telefonar, mandar um SMS ou email a um amigo a perguntar como fazer

**Estreou um filme novo. O que te leva a ir ver o filme?**

- amigos falam-te bem do filme
- vês a publicidade do filme
- lês a crítica do filme numa revista ou online
- é parecido com outros filmes que gostaste

**Estás doente. Preferes que o médico:**

- te dê um folheto a explicar o que tens
  - te explique o que se passa, mostrando-te o modelo do corpo humano
  - te mostre um gráfico que explica a tua saúde
- te diga o que se passa contigo

**Precisas de indicar um caminho a alguém. Preferes:**

- dizer o caminho
- caminhar com a pessoa até ao destino
- desenhar um mapa num pedaço de papel ou ir buscar um mapa à internet
- escrever as direções em forma de lista

**Queres preparar uma festa para a tua família. Preferes:**

- discutir o assunto com alguns amigos
- fazer algo que já tenhas experimentado antes
- encontrar instruções escritas que te digam como fazer o que queres
- tirar ideias de imagens de revistas

**Tu gostas de websites que tenham:**

- um design interessante e efeitos visuais
- canais de música, chat e conversação
- coisas que possas clicar e fazer
- informação interessante e artigos para imprimir

**Depois de ler uma história tens que fazer um projeto. Preferes:**

- escrever sobre a história?
- desenhar algo que aconteceu na história?
- ler uma parte da história?
- dramatizar uma parte da história?

**Foste escolhido para organizar um programa de férias para os teus amigos. Preferes:**

- mostrar uma lista de atividades no programa
- começar a praticar as atividades que vão fazer no programa
- mostrar um mapa onde as atividades vão acontecer e um diagrama sobre as mesmas
- descrever as atividades que vais colocar no programa

**Vais comprar uma câmara digital ou um telemóvel. O que vai influenciar a tua escolha?**

- é o último design e é bonito/a
- o vendedor fala-te sobre o artigo
- ler todas as características do aparelho
- testar o aparelho

**Queres planejar uma festa surpresa para um amigo. Preferes:**

- desenhar um mapa e criar um desenho especial para o convite
- ligar ou mandar SMS a outros amigos
- fazer uma lista das coisas que queres fazer e comprar para a festa
- convidar amigos e deixar que a festa decorra

**Lembra-te como aprendeste a jogar o último jogo de computador ou de tabuleiro. Aprendeste melhor:**

- vendo outros jogar
- lendo as instruções
  - seguindo dicas a partir de um diagrama nas instruções ouvindo
  - alguém explicar e fazendo perguntas

**Preferes que uma professora que faça uso de:**

- diagramas, gráficos, diagramas com legendas e mapas
- visitas de estudo, exemplos, vídeos, sessões práticas onde aprendes a fazer coisas
- discussões na aula, conversas e discussões online e oradores convidados
- um manual com muitas fichas

**Estás a aprender a tirar fotos com a tua nova câmara digital. Preferes:**

- exemplos de fotos boas e más e como melhorá-las
- diagramas que mostrem a câmara e como usá-la
- instruções escritas claras com listas de pontos a seguir
- a oportunidade de fazer perguntas e falar sobre as características da câmara

**Tens que apresentar as tuas ideias à turma. Preferes:**

- escrever o que vais dizer e decorar, lendo vezes sem conta o que escreveste
- escrever algumas palavras-chave e dizê-las em voz alta vezes sem conta
- fazer diagramas ou gráficos para ajudar a explicar as tuas ideias
- recolher exemplos e histórias para que as tuas ideias pareçam reais e práticas

**Um website tem um vídeo que mostra como fazer um gráfico especial. Está uma pessoa a falar, algumas listas, palavras e diagramas que descrevem o que tens de fazer. Consegues aprender melhor:**

- ouvindo.
- lendo as palavras.
- vendo os diagramas.
- vendo as ações no vídeo.

**O meu nome (a fingir!) \_\_\_\_\_**

**Result:** I Am a



learner!



## Appendix E

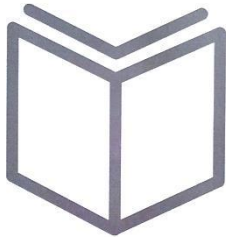
### Visual aids used during lessons



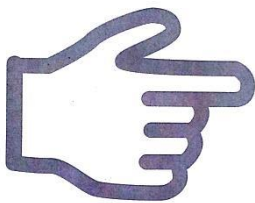
**Visual**



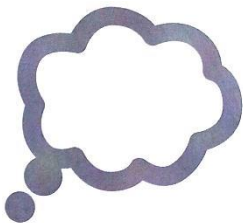
**Aural**



**Read / Write**



**Kinaesthetic**



**Think – Learn to learn**


## Appendix F

### Letters given to each VARK group for the project work

Dear V's

You learn best by SEEING. You are going to create a wall Pictionary.

You will have squares to draw the words bellow and to label pictures already assign to you. Follow this example:

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
|  |             |
|   | <b>desk</b> |

Work as a team and speak and write in English to name the objects you are going to do.

Dear A's

You learn best by LISTENING and SPEAKING. You are going to listen to an audio file and fill in the worksheet given.

Then you are going to record yourselves saying the words below:

| 1         | 2         | 3         | 4          | 5          | 6         |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Classroom | Library   | IT room   | Playground | Gym        | Cafeteria |
| Desk      | Reading   | Computers | Playing    | Playing    | Eating    |
| Chair     | Books     | Games     | Slide      | Football   | Lunch     |
| Board     | Magazines | Internet  | Swing      | Ladder     | Soup      |
| Window    | Games     | Websites  | Seesaw     | Basketball | Snack     |
| Door      | Shelves   | Desks     | Ball       | Running    | Drinking  |
| Teacher   | Chairs    | Chairs    | Garden     | Teams      | Milk      |

Dear R/W's

You learn best by READING and WRITING. You are going to solve the worksheet given to you and then you will be labelling all the objects and spaces the K's are creating. Use the pencil labels to write down the following words:

| 1         | 2       | 3         | 4          | 5      | 6     |
|-----------|---------|-----------|------------|--------|-------|
| Classroom | Library | IT room   | Playground | Window | Ball  |
| Desk      | Books   | Computers | Slide      | Door   | Bench |
| Chair     | Shelves | Internet  | Swing      | Chair  | Board |
|           |         |           | Seesaw     |        |       |

Dear K's

You learn best by DOING. Here is a list of all the things you have to do to create 4 models:

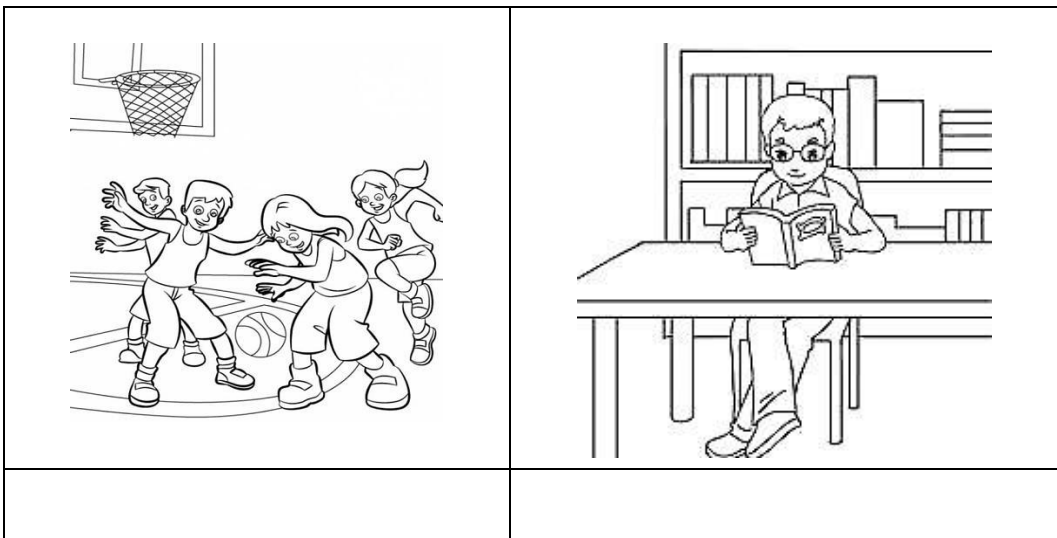
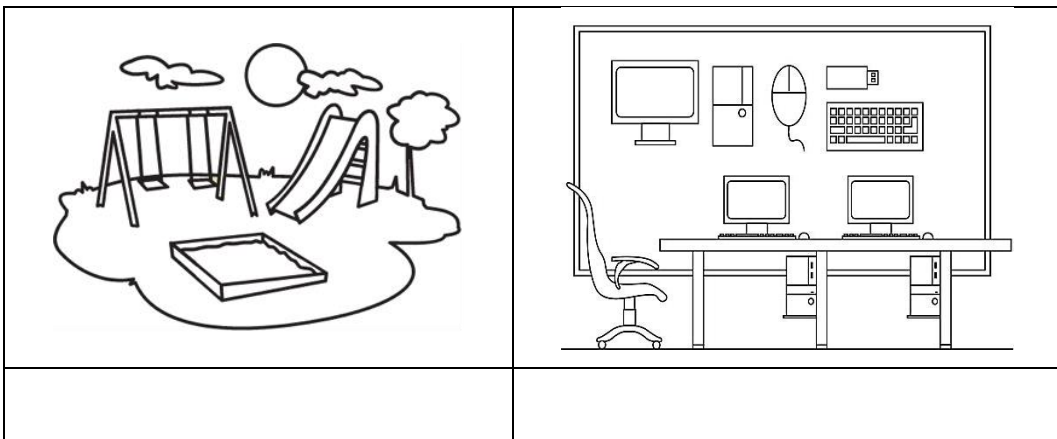
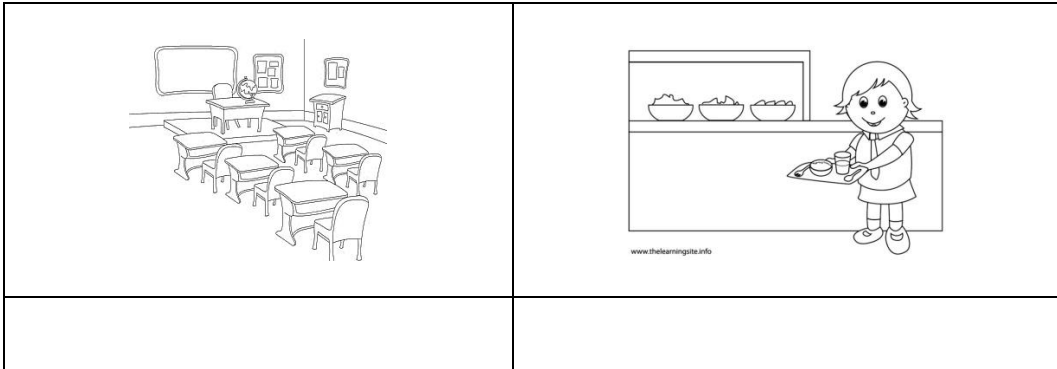
| Classroom           | IT room     | Playground | Library        |
|---------------------|-------------|------------|----------------|
| 8 desks             | 4 tables    | 1 slide    | Books          |
| 8 chairs            | 4 chairs    | 1 swing    | 2 Round tables |
| Teacher desk        | 4 computers | 1 tree     | 8 chairs       |
| Board               | 1 window    | 2 benches  | Shelves        |
| 1 wastepaper basket | 1 door      | 1 ball     | 1 window       |
| Windows             |             | 1 seesaw   |                |

Use the play dough and other materials to create the items above.

Work as a team and speak English to name the objects you are going to do.

# Appendix G

## Examples of the wall dictionary task for the Visual learners



## Appendix H

### Listening comprehension task for the Aural learners

#### 1. Listen and tick ✓ the correct option.

- a) The school is very big.
- b) The school is very small.
- c) The school is neither big nor small.

#### 2. Listen and tick ✓ the correct option.

- a) There are four classrooms, a library, a gym, a cafeteria and a playground.
- b) There are four classrooms, a library, a gym, a cafeteria and an IT room.
- c) There are four classrooms, a music room, a gym, a cafeteria and a playground.

#### 3. Listen and tick ✓ the correct option.

- a) The classroom walls are blue and the desks are white.
- b) The classroom walls are white and the desks are blue.
- c) The classroom walls are white and the desks are white too.

#### 4. Listen and tick ✓ the correct option.

- a) There are twenty desks and twenty-three chairs in the classroom.
- b) There are twenty-three desks and twenty chairs in the classroom.
- c) There are thirty desks and twenty-three chairs in the classroom.

#### 5. Listen and tick ✓ the correct option.

- a) The library is in the same room as the cafeteria.
- b) The library is in the same room as the classroom.
- c) The library is in the same room as the IT room.

#### 6. Listen and tick ✓ the correct option.

- a) The gym is big and bright.
- b) The gym is big and dark.
- c) The gym is small and dark.

#### 7. Listen and tick ✓ the correct option.

- a) My favourite place at school is the cafeteria.
- b) My favourite place at school is the playground.
- c) My favourite place at school is the library.

## Appendix I

### Reading comprehension task for the Reading/Writing learners

#### 1. Read and complete with the words in the box.

|       |           |         |            |              |         |
|-------|-----------|---------|------------|--------------|---------|
| four  | school    | desks   | playground | twenty       |         |
| white | favourite | big     | nine       | library      | gym     |
| small | cafeteria | IT room | classroom  | twenty-three | friends |

Hello! My name's Anna and I'm \_\_\_\_\_ years old. I love going to \_\_\_\_\_. My school is neither \_\_\_\_\_ nor \_\_\_\_\_. There are \_\_\_\_\_ classrooms, a \_\_\_\_\_, a gym, a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_. My \_\_\_\_\_ is lovely. The classroom walls are \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ are white too. There are \_\_\_\_\_ desks and \_\_\_\_\_ chairs in the classroom. The library is in the same room as the \_\_\_\_\_. The \_\_\_\_\_ is rather small and a bit dark but we don't mind because it's lots of fun. My \_\_\_\_\_ place at school is the playground because that's where I meet my \_\_\_\_\_. I got to go now. Goodbye!

#### 2. Change the words to personalise your own text. You can use the model to support your own text.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



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## Appendix J

### Questionnaire 3 – Learning Styles

#### Estilos de Aprendizagem

| Working with my learning style:                       |  |  |
|---|---|---|
| Helps me to learn vocabulary                          |   |   |
| Is fun  |   |   |
| Builds my self-confidence in English                  |   |   |
| Makes me concentrate                                  |   |   |
| Helps me to know myself as a student                  |   |   |
| Makes learning easier                                 |   |   |
| Helps me to realise the way others learn              |   |   |
| Distracts me  |   |   |
| Helps me to learn just like I learn with other styles |   |   |
| Does not contribute to my learning                    |   |   |
| Is boring   |   |   |
| Helps me to know my strengths                         |   |   |
| Helps me to know my shortcomings                      |   |   |
| Provides strategies to learn better                   |   |   |

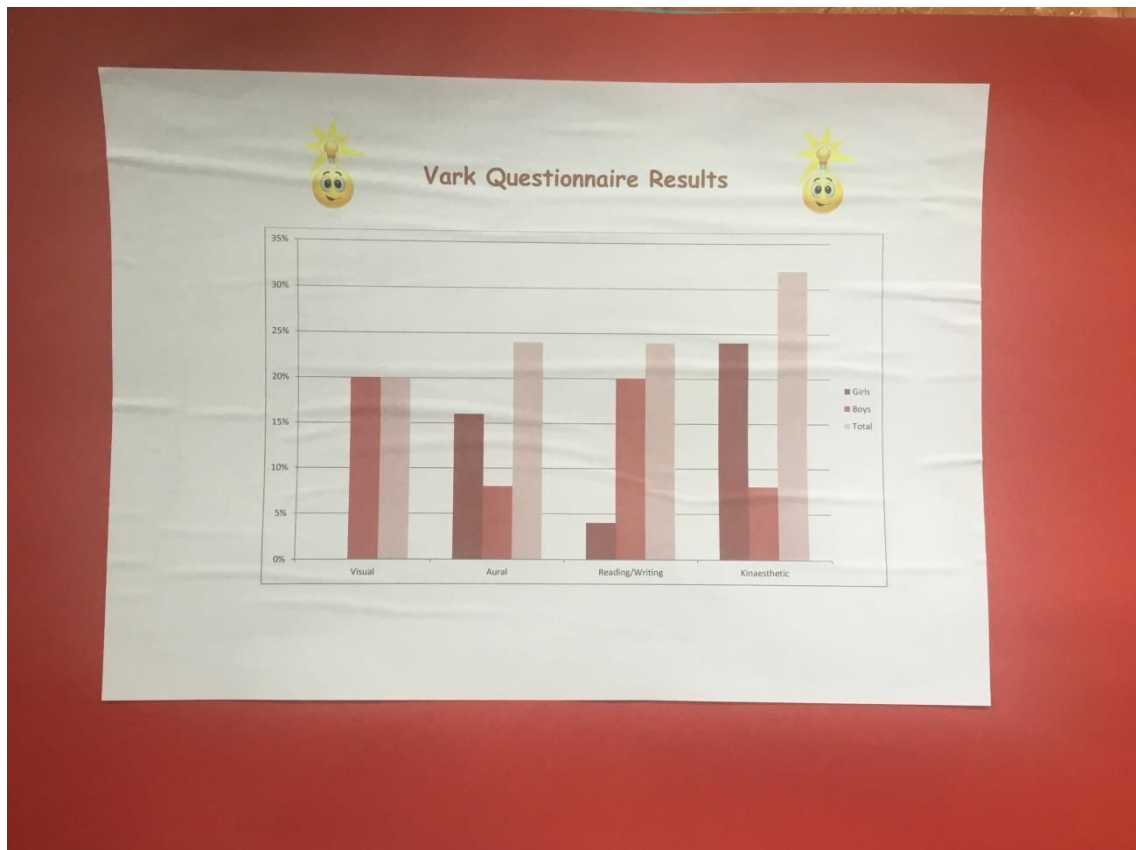
Your pretend name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix K

Poster displaying the results of the VARK questionnaire in the classroom



# Appendix L

## Poster displaying the wall dictionary

