

Public Spaces

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Case study:

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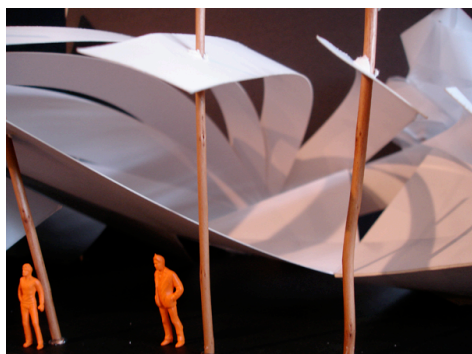
The revised National Curriculum states that during Key Stage 3, Art and Design pupils should be offered opportunities to “Engage in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary practice within the arts” and also to “Make links between art and design and other subjects and areas of the curriculum.”

(<http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/art-and-design/index.aspx> April 20, 2008). A value has been placed on cross-curricular schemes of work, making links between Art and Design and other subject areas across the curriculum. “There is nothing quite like the excitement of understanding one subject by encountering it through another. The world suddenly becomes smaller as common ground is discovered and differences turn into similarities.” (Barnes 1993, 63)

A public spaces scheme of work was developed for a Year 9 class at an all boys’ school in Stratford which offered a space for students to use their imaginations in design as well as offering them the time and the space to think about their location and environment in a wider social context. Public spaces in the city are not structures or places with a fixed characteristic or composition, formation or fabrication. Rather, they are spaces that vary in shape, size, scale, surface, and (hi)story: there is no theme, only variation. A public space is not a haphazard happening, an unplanned intervention, but on the contrary, public spaces are carefully articulated and designed punctuations of place. In 2002, Ken Livingstone pledged to “Create or upgrade 100 public spaces in London.” (Murray 2007, 4). The regeneration of London, in particular Stratford, is a complex yet highly relevant issue as the Olympic games is being held in East London in 2012.

The public spaces project was designed to give students an opportunity to openly question their changing local environment and their role within it.

The project used model making as a way of looking at space, structure and architectural possibility. Giving the pupils initial A3 card templates or ‘nets’ allowed the pupils to readily sculpt a three-dimensional volume. *Folding Architecture – Spatial, Structural and Organizational Diagrams* describes folding as a generative process in design. “Opening a fold in a surface creates spaces, which in our minds are filled with volumes... Each step is laden with potential.” (Vyzoviti 2007, 4). The act of folding generates sequences of transformations and dynamic spaces. It is something that every pupil can do, experiment and investigate with. There are innumerable possibilities: creases, folds, scores, twists, turns, punctuations, plots, knots, slots that transform a two-dimensional piece of card into a sculptural space. At the end of lesson two, all pupils achieved a positive outcome and transformed an unremarkable sheet into a re-marked public space structure.



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When the pupils designed their public space, they considered the human element that converts a static structure into a place in flux where fleeting moments and stories are composed. Scale model people 1:50 size helped pupils consider relationships between structures and audience, where people will go, and how they will move through the space. Pupils went on to do large-scale A1 drawings in ink and charcoal of their public space, thinking about not what the space looked like in physical terms, but what it was about, communicating the concept of the space.

Professional multidisciplinary practices were highlighted throughout the project to guide, inspire and highlight effective collaborative working: Greyworld, SOMA and Olafur Eliasson were at the core of this.

This scheme of work negotiates its space in the wider context of the curriculum, not only through

art and design, design technology, and geography but also mathematical questioning - ideas and practicalities of volume, surface area, scale, shape and dimension - as well as important citizenship and philosophical threads, textiles and literacy. This plurality of disciplines is not only something that is strived for in the classroom but also echoed in professional contemporary practice and models of working. The scheme of work highlights collaborative practice and the importance of dialogue across disciplines. Multi-disciplinary practice ensures that ideas and interventions collide, concepts congregate and compositions are animated.

The project was successfully delivered and all pupils produced exciting and original outcomes. Five pupils exhibited their work at the University of East London and also worked in partnership with Westfield, the developers of the new shopping mall in Stratford, during the project.

This project has great potential in moving forwards and being developed. Possibilities include furthering the links made with professional practice and really bringing open dialogue to the fore across the curriculum.

References

Barnes, R. 1993. Getting the Act Together: *It may be Cross-curricular, but is it Really Art?*. The International Journal of Art and Design Education. 12.1: 63.

Murray, P. 2007. *Public City, Places for People*. UK: New London Architecture.

Vyzoviti, S. 2007. *Folding Architecture – Spatial, Structural and Organizational Diagrams*. Netherlands: BIS Publishers.

