

Bridging the Gap Case Study

Stratford School

June 2007



“Fundamental gave students a fantastic opportunity to explore forthcoming changes to their built environment. Students were able to engage with the built environment using a wide variety of media. Brilliant planning, resourcing and teaching led to the creation of impressive work” Teacher

Background

In the Summer term 2007, a team of architectural educators descended on Stratford School as part of Bridging the Gap, an architecture and built environment education programme for schools. Here we report on what happened at Stratford School when a group of eighteen pupils from Year 9 took part in an intensive and creative series of activities to create their own designs for the Olympic Park and begin to develop a better understanding of their borough’s geography, built environment and the dramatic changes proposed as part of the plans for the 2012 Olympic Games.

What the children did

The activities were spread over two days and included a visit to Holden Point where the Olympics Viewing Gallery is currently located.

Day 1

Introduction

The day began with a discussion about the 2012 Olympics and relating the Olympic developments to the wider regeneration of Newham. This discussion helped the Bridging the Gap team to gauge the pupils’ understanding of and aspirations for Newham as host borough. The group watched Masterplan, the London 2012 Olympic bid video to help them grasp the scale of the development task ahead.

Hands-on Modelling: The Olympic Park

The class was split into ‘architectural design teams’ and each team was allocated a mini architectural brief for one of the stadiums or other buildings in the future Olympic Park including the Olympic Village and the new Stratford City development.

The Bridging the Gap team emphasised the importance of working collaboratively in their small design teams and gave the children a lot of support with this. Initially, the children worked individually, developing their ideas by sketching them. Next, they were encouraged to present their ideas to one another before evaluating them and selecting which ones they wanted to put into their final stadium or building designs.

At this point the children were introduced to the real Olympics Masterplan and were shown a very large model base representing the Olympics development site. The children's task was to create 3D models of their stadium designs, which could be placed on the Olympic site.

The Bridging the Gap team demonstrated a variety of modelling techniques. The teams then embarked on a challenging hands-on exploration, turning their sketch ideas into 3D models. Towards the end of the day, after some pretty full on glue gunning activity, the models were set in place on the model base, forming an amazing glimpse of a vibrant Olympic park development. The day ended with the teams presenting their final design to the wider group and ensuing group discussion.

Day 2

Digital Modelling: Holden Point Visit

The team met teachers and pupils bright and early at Stratford Station and walked to Holden Point (the official viewing gallery of the Olympic site). After orientating themselves in relation to the Olympic Masterplan, the pupils were tasked with tracing the skyline and Olympic Park boundary onto large A2 sheets of acetate film that had been fixed to each of the 12 observation windows. They were then encouraged to add in the stadiums and buildings that they had modelled in 3D the previous day. We believe that this group was very confident and got a long way with this tricky exercise because they had spent the whole of the previous day working on stadiums and fitting them onto the model base board of the Olympic park.¹

Design brief for the London Games Visitor Centre

Being in the elevated viewing gallery on the roof of Holden Point was the ideal place to set the challenge for the remainder of the day – to design a London Games Visitor Centre. The Bridging the Gap team had produced a simplified version of the real life brief for a Visitor Centre and the children's designs had to meet the same criteria.

The class was given an introduction to the 3D design software Sketch Up which they used to produce their own sketch and concept models of visitor centres. The team worked closely with the pupils to help them to respond to what was in effect a professional architectural brief. The resulting concept models were really quite astonishing. The children were encouraged to present their models to the wider group, their teachers and Heads of Departments.

A significant amount of extremely high quality work was produced by this group over the two day roadshow which tested the boundaries between digital and hands-on modelling. Both the team, teachers and pupils learned a lot from the amazing results..

¹ Pupils from another secondary school the team had previously worked with had found this task much tougher. This other group had carried out this sketching exercise 'cold' on day one of their roadshow and found it much harder to relate to.

What the children said

The 18 young people that took part in the roadshow were asked to complete a simple questionnaire to tell us what they thought of it.

Enjoyment

The roadshow had clearly been an enjoyable experience with 3D modelling of the Olympic Park and planned buildings emerging as the most popular of all the activities. This is typical of all schools that Bridging the Gap has visited.

New experiences

Overall nine in 10 children said that they had done something new during the roadshow, including going to new places, taking on new activities or learning a new skill. The pupils at Stratford School chose to highlight learning to use a new software package, Sketch Up which they had never encountered before.

Learning

As well as learning new facts and information about their area and the plans for the 2012 Olympics, the children were helped to make sense of the geography and physical and social impacts of regeneration across the borough. Nine in 10 of the pupils said that they would like to learn more about their area and about the Olympics after taking part in the roadshow.

More information

Bridging the Gap is devised and delivered by Fundamental Architectural Inclusion, a specialist architecture and built environment education organisation based in Newham, that seeks ways for communities to genuinely participate in the planning and development process of regeneration in their neighbourhoods. Bridging the Gap is the first 2012 Games architecture and built environment education programme, and is funded by Newham council.

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