

The Change Project

Engaging children and young people with architecture and the built environment

Executive Summary



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The project was carried out by the School of Architecture at the University of Sheffield
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Background

Children's needs tend to be marginalised in the design of our built environment. As users of the built environment, young people have valuable experiences on which they can draw in order to make important contributions to the process of architectural design. However, they rarely have either the opportunity or confidence to make this happen. Awareness of the built environment and architectural design is relatively low in the UK and yet this subject area presents an exciting opportunity for integrated, creative learning.

The Change Project ran from September 2006 to September 2008. Between January 2007 and April 2008 the project engaged over 700 young people from in and around Sheffield in activities related to architecture and the built environment. Five primary schools, two secondary schools, and two children and youth groups participated: some through one-off holiday events, some in short projects and others via extensive programmes integrated into the school timetable over a number of terms. Participants ranged from two to 25 years old.

The project aimed to:

- develop young people's confidence and ability to make their voices heard with regard to the design of architecture and the built environment;
- challenge under-achievement by providing young people with an alternative, hands-on approach to learning;
- engage young people in creative arts activities, exploring architectural design and their own experiences of the built environment;
- create a partnership between schools in South Yorkshire and the School of Architecture at Sheffield University in order to develop Architecture within formal and informal education.

The Change Project has reached more than 700 children and young people. They have gained the confidence and ability to critically participate in the design of their schools and other places of relevance to them. Around 500 people have attended exhibitions or presentations by the young participants.

Activity

	Nos.
22 development events for adults working with young people	135 adults
90 workshops within the school curriculum	295 young people
32 workshops within the extended schools agenda/youth groups	100 young people
7 workshops during school holidays	310 young people
5 exhibitions showcasing the children's work	320 attendees (app.)
6 presentations to local stakeholders and others	160 attendees
4 newspaper articles	NA

The Programmes

Every one of the programmes was designed to meet the needs of the participating group. In the schools context this meant that every programme of workshops was designed in partnership with the school, teachers and students to fit this specific context. These diverse requirements included fitting in with a primary school's improvement plan to change empty spaces in the school, exploring the teacher's role in supporting creativity in a secondary school design technology classroom, fostering sustainable attitudes in young secondary school students, or offering opportunities for relationships to develop across different year groups. In all cases, Architecture was used as a vehicle for learning and exploration.

Each programme took on the approaches evident in studio-based learning within Higher Education schools of architecture. These included:

- Live working- working with a real client on a real project
- Play-centred learning
- Collaborative learning
- Reflective processes
- Experiential learning
- Hands-on activities
- Project-based approaches

Each workshop within each programme was carefully designed to support creative processes. Particular aspects of each workshop were carefully considered. These included:

- Choice and arrangement of setting
- Chances for relationships to develop
- Opportunities for whole group communication
- Necessary resources
- Structure of the workshop- including length and order of activities
- Expression of personal views through a range of media
- Evaluative activities
- Negotiating the requirements of health and safety
- Celebrating the student's learning process in different contexts, including the school, the local community and the city of Sheffield

All of the programmes ended with the creation of a physical outcome. In one example, a group of primary pupils designed and built a mobile creative play space for their school.

In another example, concept designs for a Sheffield park developed by a group of secondary pupils were presented to Sheffield City Council.

Impact

There were clear indications of the young participants' enjoyment, inspiration and excitement about the different activities delivered. They strongly engaged with learning about architecture and the built environment and, through doing so, gained skills and confidence. In many cases the young participants created opportunities to critically participate in the design of their school environment and other areas of relevance to them.

In the extensive programmes run with schools it has been possible to track the changes in the young people, teachers and schools over time. The themes that have emerged from analysis of collected data are summarised below.

The Young People:

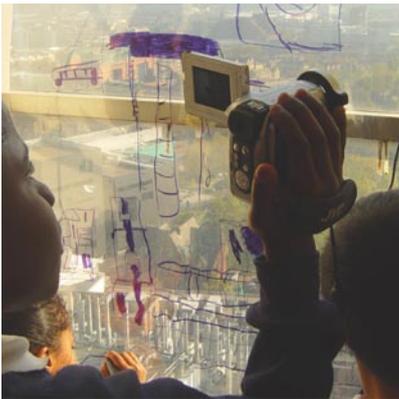
- were able to express their ideas and opinions
- made active choices about their learning
- felt recognised and proud
- were able to evaluate their own work
- learnt how to work and communicate in groups
- were engaged in learning
- used their imagination and explored ideas
- gained architectural knowledge and understanding
- gained a wide variety of curricular knowledge and skills

The Teachers:

- valued students' choices and followed their direction
- developed trust in their students
- supported a range of the students' emotions and behaviours
- built authentic relationships with students
- took part and enjoyed the activities alongside students
- explored and reflected upon different teaching methods
- studied the integration of the subject of architecture in education
- applied aspects of the project's teaching approaches into their other lessons

Key Findings

- Architecture is a great resource for learning. It offers a broad range of educational opportunities for young people and includes subjects as wide ranging as sustainability and history. It is a resource that is not well utilised and is a new area for teachers, youth workers and young people.
- Young people who influence their physical environment gain a sense of ownership and increased confidence.
- The young people gained a strong sense of achievement and autonomy through opportunities to share their work with others beyond the project.
- Young people will respond in different ways to being able to take control of their learning. Those who did well 'academically' in school found this approach the most challenging. In time, the opportunity to take control released the young peoples' ability to develop their own solutions and responses.
- If young people are engaged and enjoy their learning they are more able to remember new knowledge and behaviour can improve. Learning outside the classroom proved particularly engaging and enjoyable for young people.
- Giving teachers an opportunity to learn alongside students allows them to get to know their students on a more personal level and establish trust in them.
- Involving schools in creative projects challenges traditional approaches to education. Regular scrutiny of teaching practice and the overloaded curriculum present strong barriers.
- Activity is publicity. It raises awareness and other opportunities will arise. In this case, the project led to the development of an architecture centre for young people in Sheffield.
- Young people are enthusiastic about sharing their opinions about their physical environment with the public if they are given the opportunity to do so.
- When children and young people are engaged with their physical environment they are more likely to want to change it. Some of the young participants in the Change Project created opportunities to critically participate in the design of their school environment and other areas of relevance to them. They have proved that they do have valuable insights that can contribute to the design of the spaces and places in which they work, rest and play.



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