‘Elephant City and Butterfly Park’

Basis for the work

Anne Taylor and her assistant Atsuko Sakai had conceived the ideas for the content of the Workshop and drawn up the guidelines for carrying it out from a technical point of view a few weeks before arriving in Jyväskylä. The background to the ‘Elephant City and Butterfly Park’ Workshop is the story of the elephant and the butterfly who travelled the world, ended up resting in the cool refreshing water and gradually turned into an island. The ‘new continent’ arising from the story provides the basis for the area shared by children and architects for this town planning exercise.

According to the advance plan, the work was carried out in five groups. There were 3-4 architects in each group, one of whom was a Finn, and eight children. The children were divided up by age group and the groups were named according their work as follows:

**Group 1: Town planning (11—13 year olds)**
- Shila Abedi
- Lauri Hirsilä
- Saara Jolkkonen
- Sara Koiramäki
- Sara-Sofia Korhonen
- Stiina Lampinen
- Topias Lattu
- Salla Salmijärvi

**Group 2: Community Design (9—11 year olds)**
- Mikko Ilmoniemi
- Jori Kangasmäki
- Charlotta Kuokkala
- Hilla Ruoppila
- Aurelia Suvitie
- Ilkka Urpi
- Alisa Viinikainen
- Ville Viitala

**Group 3: Nature Sanctuary (8—10 year olds)**
- Petro Rautio
- Marko Ruokolainen
- Petra Saari
- Jussipekka Salo
- Aleksi Savolainen
- Karoliina Taavitsainen
- Eveliina Taavitsainen
- Otto Ahola

**Group 4: Bridge Design (7—9 year olds)**
- Ilja Aalto
- Elisabet Dalskaja
- Laura Jyrinki
- Leo-Emil Korhonen
- Enni Korpela
- Johanna Lappalainen
- Lotta Nygård
- Marius Pirhonen

**Group 5: Butterfly Park (6—8 year olds)**
- Elmeri Ferm
- Viljami Hoskonen
- Eetu Kallio
- Helvi Koivistö
- lisakki Marjomäki
- Mesi Pirhonen
- Anna Ruokolainen
- Petri Salmijärvi
Aims of the work and tasks of the groups

The common aim of the work was “To help students observe, think and express ideas visually and help them to develop visual and spatial thinking skills and techniques”.

The Town Planning group operated like a town planning office and was responsible for area planning (transportation, residential areas, industrial areas, business district, cultural spaces, parks and recreation, open spaces, the capital complex). The aim was “To help students understand how cooperation and collaboration contribute to the design and development of cities”.

The aim of the Community Design group was “To help students understand the elements of nature and the built environment and the functions of cities, and to help them explore the kinds of communities they would like to see in the future”. The group worked in close cooperation with the Town Planning group. These two groups were responsible for planning Elephant City and building the model.

The aim of the Nature Sanctuary group was “To help students understand structures in nature and use some of them in their design of a Nature Sanctuary”. The group planned this element and implemented it on one of the islands.

The task of the Bridge Design group was to design the bridges that were to link the different parts of Elephant Island. The aim of the work was “To help students understand the similarities between the human body and building systems and to familiarise students with types and principles of bridge construction”.

The Butterfly Park group was responsible for the design of the Butterfly Park beside the Elephant City and for building the model. The aim was “To help students gain an understanding and familiarity with colours, how they work and how they are used in park design”.

Learning environment

At Anne Taylor’s request, the work took place in the large dining hall at the Jyväskylä Teacher Training School. Besides the tables used for work, the hall housed all the materials needed for the workshop. So in practice, all 57
participants were working together in this one space for a period of two days. An open working environment promotes interaction and encourages participants to be active and take the initiative. The learning environment encouraged students to think, act and investigate. They had the chance to move around within the space, watch others working and be part of a large-scale, multi-sensory interactive field. The working conditions were completely open and transparent and appeared to be a ‘spectacular group encounter’. Thus, the participants had the opportunity to identify the elements that contribute to broad-based cooperation.

Although the official language of the workshop was English, several different languages were actually spoken in the workshop. In each group there were Finnish children, but only one Finnish-speaking architect, so that responsibility for interpreting lay naturally with the Finnish participants.

Workshop

The children started work with shared assignments:
1. Life of a Bubble
   – drawing a circular diagram

2. Great Balloon Race
   – drawing a chart

3. Elevation of a Peanut
   – elevation drawing

4. Section through a Peanut
   – section drawing

5. Elephant City and Butterfly Park
   — introducing the story
The story behind: “Elephant City and Butterfly Park”

Once upon a time a little elephant was born on the earth and his best friend was a butterfly. He was very intrigued when she told him stories about other countries, so they decided to visit those countries together.

They went around all over the world. Each time they stopped in another country they grew bigger and bigger. “What a journey!” they said. Finally the butterfly couldn’t think of any more countries to visit and the elephant realised they were very tired. “Well let’s sleep here in the ocean, it’s nice and cool.” They slept for a long time, I mean a long, long time! After all those years of sleeping, the elephant and butterfly became an island on the earth. You can still see their memories and souvenirs of the trip around the world all over the island. The people who live on the island know how much the elephant and butterfly loved nature, so they have created a nature sanctuary and the butterfly became a beautiful park. Many people love this special island very much and the important features of the elephant and the butterfly, so they have decided to design an Elephant City.

Having heard the story, the groups began working on Elephant City and Butterfly Park. At the request of the project leader, the architects had brought with them literature and illustrative material related to the theme of each group. With this material to help them, the children tried to sort out the themes and their points of departure.

Towards shared goals

Planning and leading the work within the groups was the responsibility of the architects who took part, so each group approached the common goals in different ways and through different processes.

Through discussion, the children in the Town Planning and Community Design groups became familiar with their own home town and the home towns of the architects who came from abroad. The actual town planning work was begun by considering the kinds of places and functions that ought to be included. After area planning, the greatest challenge for the Town Planning and Community Design groups was cooperating within the group and with other groups.
The Nature Sanctuary group started work by discussing important experiences of nature and by drawing their favourite spots and places that had stuck in their minds. After this, they switched to making a model of the terrain and painting it. Each of the children was allowed to choose a favourite spot on the finished model that was investigated and illustrated with section drawings and collages. Finally, the children built models placing their favourite spots in the natural surroundings and finished off their own bit of the shared model.

The children in the Bridge Design group made drawings of bridges and found out about the construction of bridges and their functions by making 'human structures' and 'human bridges'. All the members of the group designed a bridge of their own and built two models, one of which was used to show the details of the construction and the other was used as part of the joint model. The group thought their biggest challenge was cooperating with the Town Planning group over the traffic arrangements.

The Butterfly Park group proceeded towards the shared goal by carrying out experiments with colours and materials. The children worked with collages of coloured paper, for example, and with natural materials found in their immediate surroundings, and then switched over from this to building a model of Butterfly Park made out of natural materials.
The outcome of the fifth group’s work was a model of Elephant Island with each group making its own contribution. This model was important, tangible evidence of the work of the 57 participants. On the journey towards this shared goal, the children played, studied, experimented, and built. From the learning perspective, the most important thing for children and architects alike was the shared working process.

Conclusion

Group photograph - all those who took part in the Soundings for Architecture 4 workshop.
The Elephant City and Butterfly Park workshop came to an end with a ceremony in which certificates were distributed and the Elephant Island model was displayed in the main building of the University of Jyväskylä on July 31, 2003.