

LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM HERITAGE SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

Guidance Notes

PLANNING, PRODUCING AND RUNNING LEARNING ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

These guidance notes are intended to help smaller heritage organisations to develop successful learning activities and resources. The **activities** might be guided tours, craft and art workshops, object handling sessions, costumed drama workshops or interviews with 'experts'. The **resources** might be publications, websites, facsimile collections, loan boxes, collections of objects for handling or oral history recordings. With such a wide range of possibilities, the notes focus on principles and processes rather than content. More detail can be found through the web links at the end of the notes. In these notes the term 'collections' is used to define your heritage assets, which may include objects, archives, buildings, historic landscapes and even the specialist staff who work there.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT LEARNING ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES?

- It provides you with a structured way of interpreting your collections from the user's perspective.
- It asks you to consider learning as a two-way, not a one-way process (as described in the Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge indicators), offering variety and flexibility to meet the needs of different learners.
- You provide a resource which schools can use to enhance their studies.
- You can explore ways of working with new audiences.
- Members of your organisation will develop skills at the same time.

PRACTICAL TIP

Be analytical: to consider whether an activity (including static displays or buildings as well as serviced activities) encourages learning make an evaluation table, then break down the activity into stages (or 'experiences') and describe what users are actually learning at each stage. What could you add to improve the learning outcomes?

PLANNING, PRODUCING . . .

First principles

The process is simple: match your assets to your users' needs. Keep a balance between your agenda (e.g. preserving and enhancing an important coin collection) and your users' agendas (e.g. developing language skills through using historic evidence). At first it may seem that the two agendas don't coincide! However the learning objectives required by schools are in fact the same learning objectives that you use as professionals (i.e. you use language skills when studying historic evidence to preserve and enhance your collections).

1. Consider how your collections can encourage learning

Your collections are unique. They will certainly have local significance but may also be important on a regional, national or even international level. However content is only one part of their potential for learning. Think about how your collections develop skills such as literacy or problem-solving. Think about how they can improve creativity, or change people's attitudes and views – even their behaviour. A heritage visit can achieve much more than is possible in the classroom, by exposing children to original evidence in a historical context. Nevertheless it's very important to see visits as part of a continuous, progressive experience, not just a stand-alone trip. You need to be able to provide activities or resources for teachers to prepare for their visit, and to follow it up.

2. Find out what your users need

- Schools have their own agenda in the form of the National Curriculum. Teachers must be confident that you can help them to deliver the curriculum before they will be willing to commit time and energy to organising a trip out of school. As above, though, the curriculum is more about skills than content. Your activities and resources need to be designed around these skills. Read the National Curriculum first so that you can decide on appropriate learning objectives for your activities and resources.
- Consider the difference between teaching and learning: they are not mutually exclusive. The best teacher is the one who helps the most children to learn, but every child is different – by age, ability or cultural background – and you need to be aware of a range of learning patterns. You also need to consider different learning styles: some children learn best through language, others through visual images, others through activity. Your activities need to cover a range of learning styles. Smaller organisations have an advantage here – services tend to be less programmed and more personal so it may be easier to make changes to accommodate different needs.
- Schools need to consider other agendas such as 'Every Child Matters' or 'Hear by Right'. It's worth being aware of these at the planning stage. The best way to find out is to talk to teachers or education advisers.

3. Test your ideas

You will need some friendly teachers and pupils to help you evaluate your services. The essential feedback is that which gives you constructive criticism, so make sure that your evaluation processes allow opportunities for this. See the guidance notes on evaluation for more details.

... AND RUNNING

Assuming that users have been consulted and your activity or resource has been designed to meet their needs, then your activities should run smoothly. However changes may take place – either in the way you are delivering the activity or in the way schools are using it – so you need to monitor it to keep standards high:

- Day to day monitoring is essential – that's the only way you can find out whether or not the children are learning what you and the teacher intended.
- Include a plenary session at the end of the activity to get direct feedback from the pupils and teachers.
- If possible, get the teacher to complete an evaluation form before leaving the site.
- Take an interest in the way your staff, volunteers or freelancers are delivering the session, observing sessions from time to time and always having a debriefing at the end of the day. These discussions will throw up issues about behaviour management, who is responsible for supervision and control, timing issues and adapting to unforeseen circumstances.

- Act on any issues which affect the organisation more widely (e.g. access, opening hours, costing, etc.) to demonstrate a unified approach to learning.
- Publicise your successes to show participants, staff, stakeholders and future users that your organisation has learning at the core of its work.

CASE STUDIES

Learning resource – Shaftesbury Abbey

Shaftesbury Abbey was once one of England's most important nunneries, with strong links to the Saxon royal family. It's now a ruin with a small archaeological museum in the grounds, run as a charitable trust by volunteers. The museum had secured a grant to commission a 'virtual fly through' of the Abbey as it appeared in the Middle Ages and an educational resource to complement this. As they didn't have expertise in-house they engaged an education consultant to consult local teachers and write a resource which would meet the needs of the school curriculum while furthering the Abbey's educational aims and raising its local profile. Local primary and secondary teachers suggested the themes and subject matter that they would use, noting that although they were close enough to visit the Abbey they would prefer to have a resource that they could use to prepare for such a field trip and follow it up later. This led to an addition to the Abbey's website, containing five classroom activities designed for delivery by the teacher, saved as Word and PDF files. The Abbey built on its strengths by using material that wasn't otherwise available – historic maps, images of objects in the collections and 'history detective' trails using evidence of medieval nuns and a Saxon mystery.

Learning activity and resource – Ford Park Cemetery, Plymouth

Ford Park Cemetery has been used as a burial ground since the Victorian period, and also contains the graves of all of the civilians who lost their lives when Plymouth was bombed during the Second World War. A charitable trust runs the cemetery and set about interpreting its history, using funding from the Lottery to restore a Victorian building as a social and education centre. From their own funds they paid a consultant to help them to develop a further 'Awards for All' Lottery small grant to create an oral history archive to record and celebrate the memories of Plymothians who had lived through the Blitz. Besides collecting the oral history interviews, they wanted the process itself to be a learning activity, and decided to use schools to do the interviews. They took advice from the Record Office, which had run similar intergenerational projects, and which would eventually receive the digital recordings. The trust was fortunate to have two ex-BBC technicians amongst its volunteers and it was decided to film the interviews and to pass on the equipment to the participating schools at the end of the project. A consultant was engaged to train the children to do the interviews, while the volunteers taught them filming techniques. Other volunteers collected the names of local people happy to be interviewed and matched the schools with the interviewees. The technicians edited the interviews, which would be used in a temporary exhibition about the Blitz when the new centre opened. The project achieved excellent learning outcomes for all concerned:

- Besides achieving a high quality DVD, the children and young people learnt new skills and experienced high levels of responsibility;
- The trust's volunteers built links with the community and found out about current education practice in advance of their further involvement with local schools through their education centre;
- The interviewees enjoyed being interviewed by the children and felt that the importance of their stories was recognised by the community.

Learning activity and resource – 'Evacuation in Sunderland during World War II'

The education manager at Tyne and Wear Archives worked with a teacher at a secondary school in Sunderland through the 'Learning Links' programme. This provided funding to enable teachers to take up placements in cultural venues. In this case the teacher wanted to develop resources for GCSE

History students studying the Second World War. Her students needed local stories about the period for a piece of coursework on evacuation. In addition to time spent by the teacher, the students were also able to use the Archives Service to carry out their own research, as well as recording oral history interviews with former Sunderland evacuees. The resulting e-learning resource is available for all local schools to use. The learning outcomes included:

- Development of students' research skills using primary sources;
- Students found out about archives and several opted to study history at Key Stage 5;
- The teacher and archive education manager gained valuable insights into each others' work;
- The experience of carrying out oral history interviews led the teacher to plan to repeat this with future classes.

RESOURCES

1. National Curriculum <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/>
2. Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency <http://www.qcda.gov.uk/>
3. MLA Learning Links programme
http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/programmes/commissioning/Learning_Links_2009-11
4. Inspiring Learning for All <http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/>
5. Renaissance South East ABC of working with schools
http://www.museumse.org.uk/ABC_working_with_schools/
6. Gardner, Howard. (1983) "Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences." (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_multiple_intelligences)
7. Every Child Matters www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/
8. Hear by Right <http://hbr.nya.org.uk/>
9. Shaftesbury Abbey http://www.shaftesburyheritage.org.uk/teachers_notes.php
10. Ford Park Cemetery Trust <http://www.ford-park-cemetery.org/>
11. MLA case studies <http://research.mla.gov.uk/index.php> - see 'Evacuation in Sunderland during World War II' project

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about LOtC, the Quality Badge and learning through heritage, visit the following websites:

www.lotc.org.uk

www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk

www.gem.org.uk

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