Formal Learning Toolkit

Written and produced by Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service

Introduction

Formal Learning is where learning takes place in a structured way, with specific learning outcomes. The most common format is the school visit but includes College and University sessions and Adult Education. There is a grey area for workshops and learning for hobbies.

These are great to do, but take time to arrange and organise and it can be a challenge to communicate with schools.

Guiding principles

1. **Think carefully what can you offer** - Think about your strengths, your collections, your staff / volunteers and your building. Stick to your core strengths, what you have and draw on your USP (Unique Selling Points).
2. **Know why groups come to your site** (or invite you to their site) - Schools need a good reason to disrupt their timetable, especially if it costs money.
3. **Define learning outcomes** - What will they learn? You need to ensure that your group achieves the pre-defined learning outcomes required by the course/curriculum.
4. **Be fun and interactive** – Make the visit an enjoyable experience, using objects, images and your building creatively.
5. **Plan** – Ensure everything is planned well, having a structured outline of the session with resources all ready, risk assessment completed and have contingencies.

Set your goals

Think about what you want to offer and why. Ensure it links to your overall goals.

Remember to set SMART goals

Specific: Set targets for what you want with the creation of a formal learning activity and implement it.

Measurable: How many events / visits do you plan to offer?

Achievable: Can your plan be carried out within your resource and will groups want to take part?

Realistic: Do you have the capacity to do this?

Time: When do you want to create and deliver session? Think about what times of year are best.

Conduct an audit

Consider what you want to do as a group if possible, visually mapping out the steps.

- Think about why you want to do this? Ensure it is a high priority compared to other activities before you proceed.
- Have a think about what you can offer? Space, subjects, staff (including volunteers). What is your Unique Selling Point which will interest people?
- Find out what schools and others want. Try to find teachers to ask from local contacts.
- What capacity do you have to plan and deliver, including having the right space and facilities. If it's too much for your organisation to offer then it's ok to concentrate on other things.

Guidance and tips

What can you offer? What is your unique selling point – building, artefacts, local history, resources, staff knowledge? Stick to your strengths and keep it simple, e.g. schools may want to study Ancient Greeks or Great Fire of London but you might not be the best organisation to offer this.

- What do schools want? They need an excuse to break the normal timetable so needs to fit the curriculum (which you can check online) or some other key reason to work with you. Can you ask? All schools are different. Think about sessions that are not just history – art, maths, drama, geography, citizenship, science, e.g. Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service offered a workshop on papermaking but schools couldn't justify the time or costs.
- Do you have help or advice from colleagues or volunteers or know teachers who can help?
- Plan the session. What are your learning outcomes, what will the children come away with? Think about equipment, layout of room, practicalities of movement, technology. Have a running guide and script so others can deliver the session too.
- Make sessions interactive and tailor to the appropriate age and knowledge level.
- Consider if a topic may be too complicated.
- Who will deliver sessions? You could just provide the venue and resources? Training or shadowing at another venue may help your team gain confidence?
- Risk assess your sessions.
- Have back up activities and be prepared to be flexible!

Communication

Contacting schools is hard and there is no 'magic bullet'. Teachers are very busy and have little time to read emails or flyers and often the school office is a gatekeeper. You will need a variety of approaches including direct contact, social media, details in publicity and on your website. Personal contact is great but doesn't guarantee success. Make sure schools know how this will help with their lessons and teaching and that it will be relevant with specific details in publicity and on your website or consider giving a short presentation for the parent-governors meeting.

Handy hints

- Plan – Have a detailed lesson plan with everything you need. Visits are very busy and flow quickly so make sure everything is planned out and ready.
- Have a plan for if something finishes early.
- If you get asked a question you can't answer, say so and try to find the answer and pass it back to the school. We can't know everything!
- Remember you're not a teacher – stick to your strengths.

Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service case study - WWI workshops

During the WWI Centenary there was an increased focus on this period. WAAS considered new workshops and looked into the feasibility of creating WWI based resources.

Initially it may seem unlikely that it would be something for WAAS to concentrate on, as fighting took place overseas but by brainstorming we identified two strands – letters in the archives from soldiers, and the Home Front. Both used our resources so were relevant to us delivering sessions.

Work was carried out assembling content – the letters, as well as newspapers stories, photos, and school log books. Teachers who we knew were asked for their comments, especially if they thought schools would find this content useful. If they said they didn't find it useful, WAAS would not have proceeded. The answer was positive, especially as schools would use local examples and primary sources.

Two workshops were drafted and developed. Both workshops included the use of original documents. However, we mostly used printed copies so children could handle documents easily. Some documents were hard to read, either because they were handwritten or had small text, so we found ways to highlight what we wanted children to look for. Letters were typed up and also recorded being read out so save time.

Action plan

Short term actions

- Have a team brainstorming session to look at possibilities, and identify what your strengths are. This includes your team's skills and experience and your own organisation and collections.
- Check if there are any teachers your staff and volunteers know who you could consult. For general advice they can be anywhere in the country, although it's good to find out what local teachers want.
- Check the curriculum to familiarise yourself and see how your content might fit in. A few schools follow different curricula though so there can be exceptions.
- Review your space, if you want groups to come to you ensure it's suitable.
- Decide if it is worth proceeding in the light of the above. If you don't think you have the resources or skills you might want to investigate other avenues of delivery.

TOP TIP: Focus on what is most relevant to your venue and organisation.

Medium term actions

- Write a plan for a session (or commission someone to do this), writing down the aims of the visit, the running order, information and timings.
- Identify what you need – copies of documents or photos, replica objects, real artefacts, stationery etc.
- Trial a session, even if it is with a few adults to see how the session flows and to get feedback.
- Arrange training or shadowing opportunities at a similar venue if whoever is delivering feels they could use it.
- Market your offer. Make contact with schools, advertise in your newsletters and social media and use contacts.

TOP TIP: When planning the session always think what would attract a school, college or individual to choose to come. Create something they want

Long term actions

- Evaluate. Getting feedback from teachers is hard so not always possible. Whoever leads can note how it went and you can ask someone to sit in for another perspective.
- Review to see if the session can be improved and if it can be adapted for other topics or age groups.
- Build on initial marketing to include your formal learning offer in your regular communications and look for new ways to publicise what you are doing.
- Repeat! This makes the investment in preparation worthwhile.
- Use these resources elsewhere, for instance in family activity days. This reuses your time and effort and promotes your workshops.

TOP TIP: Try to get other team members shadowing or involved in sessions so you have a wider pool for the future, or someone can step in if needed.

Evaluation

Staff who deliver sessions can keep a record of how sessions went and note anything which needs adapting.

Getting feedback from children and teachers is hard. You could do a simple tick sheet for children as they leave to capture their experiences. Try to ask teachers at the end of sessions (you may need a colleague to do this as you may not have time) how they felt the session went and whether it met their objectives– very few will reply after they leave as they are so busy, even if they say they will!

Depending on what you have programmed at your venue, you could give children a 'voucher' or something to bring back if they come to see you in the next few weeks, to see if it encourages them to return.

You could ask a 'critical friend' or colleague to sit in and provide feedback.

Resources & further reading

National Curriculum www.gov.uk/national-curriculum (although some schools may follow other systems or opt out).

Ideas

The National Archives www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/ They may have more resources but have a look for ideas and see what they offer.

https://www.ukschooltrips.co.uk/school-trip-museum-ideas-for-primary-and-secondary-schools.html

Planning visits

http://www.show.me.uk/editorial/6614-for-teachers-planning-a-museum-or-gallery-visit for teachers but provides useful information from their perspective.

Examples of good practice (includes formal learning example)
www.aim-museums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/AIM-Research-Study-Examples-of-Successful-Practice.pdf

Making the Introduction: Museum School Visits
HTTPS://ARTMUSEUMTEACHING.COM/2012/09/30/MAKING-THE-INTRODUCTION-MUSEUM-SCHOOL-VISITS/
American article but useful information to think about.

https://nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/JGriffin_2011.html Australian article but interesting to read.

Historic England guide to 'Planning Outstanding Local History and Heritage Projects at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3'
https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/education/explorer/planning-outstanding-local-history-and-heritage-projects-pdf/

Online course

https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/museum-learning

Organisations who might be able to help

Historical Association www.history.org.uk/ for teachers, it can provide useful curriculum links and ideas.

Association of Independent Museums www.aim-museums.co.uk/

Museums Association www.museumsassociation.org/

Explore the Past
Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service
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