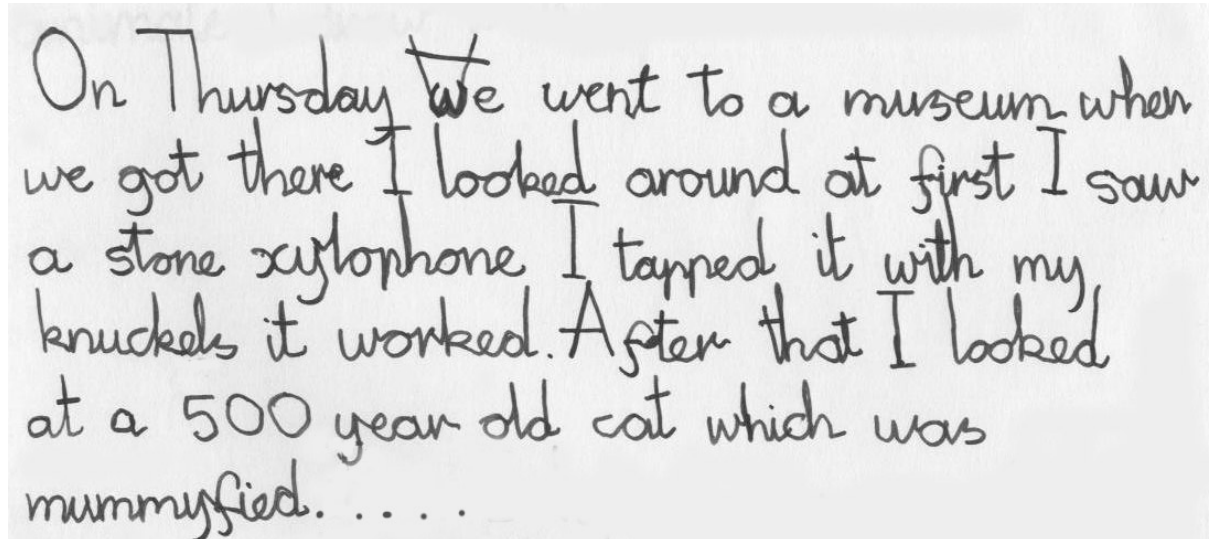


Opportunities in the curriculum – Museums for learners

By Mick Waters, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Many years ago, as a teacher, I took a group of children to a museum in Keswick, Cumbria as part of a residential educational visit. One of the children wrote this:



On Thursday we went to a museum when we got there I looked around at first I saw a stone xylophone I tapped it with my knuckles it worked. After that I looked at a 500 year old cat which was mummified.

We didn't know at the time, but it was to be an experience of some significance.

The school curriculum should be seen in its widest sense – as an entire planned learning experience. This includes formal lessons as well as events, routines, visits and learning that take place outside the classroom and beyond the school. All these components are interconnected. Quality learning outside the classroom is prepared and followed up in the classroom.

The challenge for teachers and educational providers is to ensure learning outside the classroom compels learners and connects to other learning.

A Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) adviser recently attended a museum conference designed to examine opportunities for learning experiences in museums with the new secondary curriculum. The conference organisers duplicated the new programmes of study for two subjects and distributed them for discussion. However, this only scratched the surface. The course involved delegates investigating galleries in the museum to determine the potential of the new curriculum. They talked to school groups visiting the museum that day. The delegates questioned learners about what they were doing and discovered the learners were filling in worksheets answering closed questions that drilled down to the detail of exhibits. These activities could have been completed in the classroom; rarely were learners provided with opportunities to lift their heads and investigate the unfolding story of gallery. Neither were the learners encouraged to enjoy the impressive interior and

architecture of the museum. For many of these learners, this was probably the largest building in which they had ever been.

Museums and schools must consider the entire planned learning experiences when designing visits. They need to consider how opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) and cross curriculum dimensions can be incorporated, as well as how the subject key concepts, processes and curriculum opportunities can be interwoven to provide a coherent learning experience. The new secondary curriculum provides opportunities for schools and organisations like museums to design compelling learning experiences that support the new statutory aims of the curriculum – to develop successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. The statutory aims are:

The aims of the curriculum

The curriculum should enable all young people to become:

- **successful learners** who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve
- **confident individuals** who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives
- **responsible citizens** who make a positive contribution to society.

Successful learners who...	Confident individuals who...	Responsible citizens who...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ have the essential learning skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology ■ are creative, resourceful and able to identify and solve problems ■ have enquiring minds and think for themselves to process information, reason, question and evaluate ■ communicate well in a range of ways ■ understand how they learn and learn from their mistakes ■ are able to learn independently and with others ■ know about big ideas and events that shape our world ■ enjoy learning and are motivated to achieve the best they can now and in the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ have a sense of self-worth and personal identity ■ relate well to others and form good relationships ■ are self-aware and deal well with their emotions ■ have secure values and beliefs and have principles to distinguish right from wrong ■ become increasingly independent, are able to take the initiative and organise themselves ■ make healthy lifestyle choices ■ are physically competent and confident ■ take managed risks and stay safe ■ recognise their talents and have ambitions ■ are willing to try new things and make the most of opportunities ■ are open to the excitement and inspiration offered by the natural world and human achievements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ are well prepared for life and work ■ are enterprising ■ are able to work cooperatively with others ■ respect others and act with integrity ■ understand their own and others' cultures and traditions, within the context of British heritage, and have a strong sense of their own place in the world ■ appreciate the benefits of diversity ■ challenge injustice, are committed to human rights and strive to live peaceably with others ■ sustain and improve the environment, locally and globally ■ take account of the needs of present and future generations in the choices they make ■ can change things for the better.

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QCA is working in partnership with a wide range of groups and organisations, including Group for Education in Museums (GEM), Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and individual museums and galleries to promote and develop consistent guidance to support schools in achieving this.

Through wider research and ongoing consultations with young people, QCA gathered information about what motivates – and de-motivates – learners. One of the most important motivating factors for young people is how relevant they feel the curriculum relates to their own lives and expectations for the future. For the past eight years, we have annually commissioned the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) to conduct a review of research literature on learners' experiences with the national curriculum. The latest report reviews the findings of 314 different publications. Conducted in 2006 by

Pippa Lord and Megan Jones, the report – *Pupils' experiences and perspectives of the national curriculum and assessment: final report for the research review* – can be downloaded from the QCA website http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_7068.aspx.

A key message in the report states: 'Pupils require more visible messages about the relevance of the curriculum to daily and future life. They might also benefit from greater awareness of connections across the curriculum. Pupils more readily perceive *lack of* relevance and link this to feelings of boredom, difficulty and disengagement. Thus, a curriculum "*brought alive by making it relevant to their everyday lives*" is a sentiment espoused in many of the research findings.'

The report also highlights that learners rarely see connections outside subject boundaries. Overall, learners view their curriculum experiences as subject-compartmentalised. They rarely voice perceptions of interconnections or whole curriculum experiences. However, when recognised, learners feel that connections across subject areas are important and beneficial to their learning and understanding. Learning outside the classroom clearly provides relevance and opportunities for learners to see how subjects interconnect.

In the last edition of the *Journal for Education in Museums*, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill pointed out that museums offer learning that captures the imagination ('Measuring learning in museums: the research and its findings', issue 28). For example, a child recalls a deliciously scary event at Exeter Museum – being mummified. At the bottom of the children's questionnaire there was a space for writing or drawing: 'This is me on the table being mummified....aaaaaghh!!!!!!' The child completely surrendered to the imaginative moment, a truly compelling learning experience.

'We also found that pupils became more determined to learn, largely because as their emotions were touched, commitment grew, and they wanted to go further. Some pupils succeeded where they didn't think they could, and this made them raise their aspirations.' Teachers said: "Seeing a spitfire – they get a sense of size, of how flimsy it was...!'

In October 2008 Ofsted published a report entitled *Learning outside the classroom: how far should you go?* which stated in its introduction: 'At a time when the government is actively promoting learning outside the classroom, this report evaluates the importance of such learning in primary and secondary schools and colleges. It identifies strengths and weaknesses in practice and shows how schools and colleges overcome common barriers that can limit successful learning outside the classroom. In doing so, it provides models that others could consider.'

The key findings and recommendations included the following points:

'When planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils' personal, social and emotional development.'

'Learning outside the classroom was most successful when it was an integral element of long-term curriculum planning and closely linked to classroom activities.'

'Schools and colleges should:

- ensure that their curriculum planning includes sufficient well structured opportunities for all learners to engage in learning outside the classroom as a key, integrated element of their experience
- evaluate the quality of learning outside the classroom to ensure that it has maximum impact on learners' achievement, personal development and wellbeing
- ensure equal and full access for all learners to learning outside the classroom by monitoring participation in activities by different groups of learners and removing any barriers.'

'Learners of all ages involved in the survey said that they enjoyed working away from the classroom. They found it "exciting", "practical", "motivating", "refreshing" and "fun". They made such comments as:

- "You see rather than listen."
- "We learn in a fun way."
- "We like learning by doing."

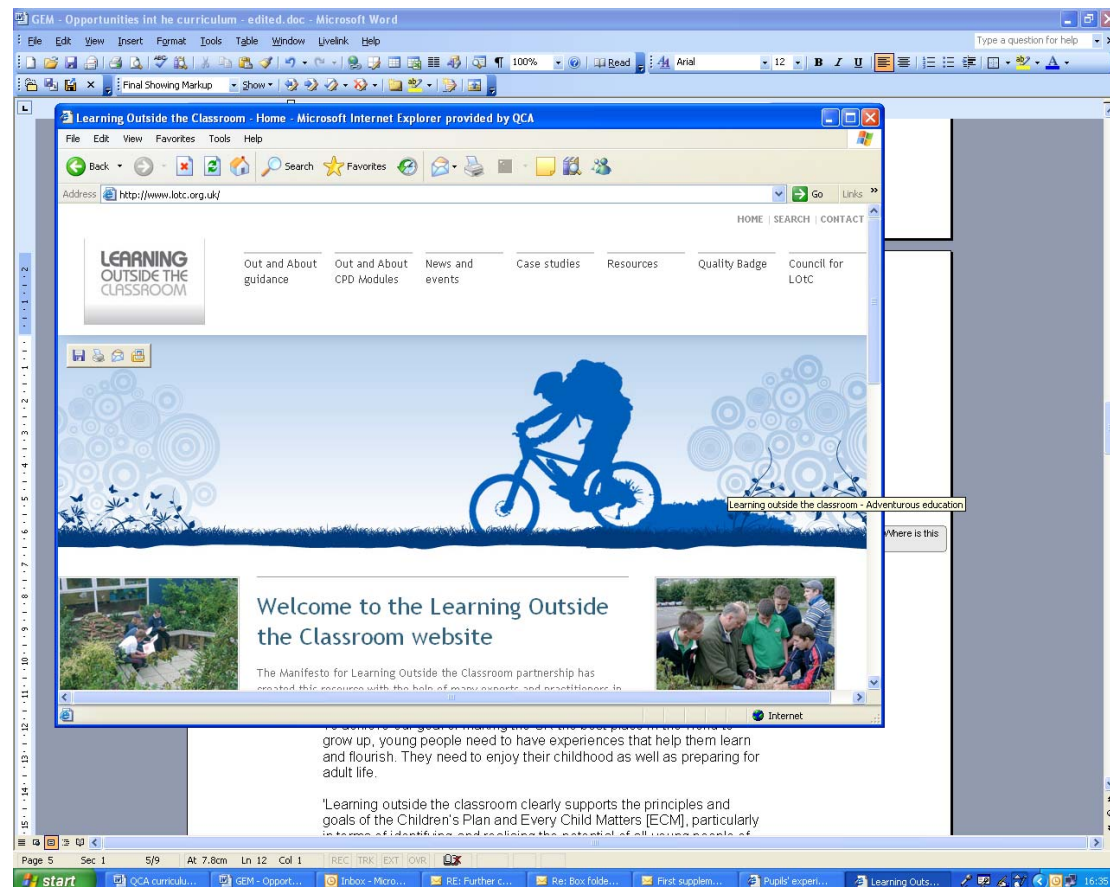
'However, this level of rigour was too often missing from the planning of primary school day visits. The objectives for the visit were rarely defined carefully enough, or related sufficiently to classroom work. This was particularly the case with visits to external providers, such as museums, galleries, field centres or theatre workshops.'

'One of the main reasons for using these providers was to capitalise on their expertise. Very often, staff from the providers rather than the schools contributed much of the teaching. However, because there tended to be little liaison or planning with the schools before the visit, it was difficult for the providers to know what the pupils already knew or were meant to learn. Many providers produced worksheets and other educational materials; these were of high quality and available freely to the schools. However, schools often used these uncritically, without ensuring that they were relevant enough or adapting them sufficiently to their own classes' particular learning activities.'

'When visiting an external provider, such as a museum or art gallery, secondary schools were less likely than primary schools to transfer responsibility for organisation and teaching to the provider. They also tended to have a clearer educational purpose. A representative from one provider summed up the view of many when she said: "Primaries look for a good experience. Secondaries fit it more to their scheme of work."

There are clearly some very useful messages in this report. The following points were included in the detail of the report, in particular the need for museum providers to work closely with schools; in other words the need for detailed planning to ensure that the experience of the visit to the museum is completely integrated to learning in the classroom before and after the visit.

On the same day as the publication of the Ofsted report, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) launched a new website providing guidance and support for learning outside the classroom.



DCSF's Learning Outside the Classroom website (www.lotc.org.uk) helps professionals working with young people provide high-quality experiences. The section of the website titled 'What are we trying to achieve?' echoes the key messages of the Ofsted report.

'Learning experiences outside the classroom are often the most memorable, helping young people to make sense of the world around them, and transferring learning experienced outside to the classroom and vice versa. By realising that education doesn't only happen within the classroom, young people start on the journey of lifelong learning. To achieve our goal of making the UK the best place in the world to grow up, young people need to have experiences that help them learn and flourish. They need to enjoy their childhood as well as preparing for adult life.'

'Learning outside the classroom clearly supports the principles and goals of the Children's Plan and Every Child Matters [ECM], particularly in terms of identifying and realising the potential of all young people of all ages (an alternative view of ECM). The big picture expresses the entire planned learning experience for all young people.'

'There is an increasing body of evidence which clearly demonstrates the benefits for young people's learning and personal development. In summary, when young people learn outside the classroom, they:

- are exposed to new experiences and enjoy the novelty
- learn in different ways related to their learning types
- are motivated to learn more and feel positive about learning
- become self-confident, developing self-esteem and self-awareness
- work collaboratively, fostering decision-making and language skills
- communicate purposefully with peers and adults
- are healthier, and their sense of wellbeing increases
- appreciate the links integrated in the learning, and experience cross-curricular learning.'

The website goes on to state: 'Learning outside the classroom is not an addition to the curriculum but should become integral to it and a regular part of teaching and learning. To make sure that happens, it is important to build learning outside the classroom into the development of schemes of work and into curriculum planning at every stage.'

DCSF's *Learning Outside the Classroom* website reinforces this point in greater detail in another section: 'This collaborative planning is crucial when planning for residential experiences. Leaders should liaise closely with the provider organisation beforehand to plan how the chosen activities can draw on, and develop further, the learning that has taken place at school. If the leader's professional skills and their knowledge of the particular needs of the young people are not used well enough, there is the danger that the visit may be an isolated special event, rather than an extended and powerful learning experience.'

On 13 February 2008, the government announced that each child should be offered at least five hours of high quality culture per week, in and out of school, thus providing further opportunities for the development of compelling learning experiences in museums and art galleries. *Find Your Talent* (www.findyourtalent.org) has been launched to support this development.

QCA must develop a modern, world-class curriculum to inspire and challenge all learners and prepare them for the future. This is an exciting moment in the development of secondary education. QCA launched the new online secondary curriculum in July 2007 to prepare for phased implementation in schools, which began for year 7 in September 2008 (curriculum.qca.org.uk). The new curriculum puts learners at its heart. It challenges learners to:

- reflect on their learning and identify how they can improve

- exercise choice and develop as independent, lifelong learners
- see the relevance of what they are learning to their present and future lives
- actively engage with and help shape the curriculum they experience.

The new curriculum establishes clear aims that focus on the qualities and skills learners need to succeed in school and beyond. The curriculum should enable all young people to become:

- successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve
- confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives
- responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

These aims are statutory and incorporate the five outcomes of Every Child Matters; they have been the starting point for all the changes to the secondary curriculum. They should inform all aspects of curriculum planning and teaching and learning at whole school and subject levels. This will enable schools to design a curriculum around the specific needs, capabilities and aspirations of their learners, and help them to achieve the outcomes of Every Child Matters. These aims provide an important starting point for developing compelling learning experiences in museums and art galleries.

To give schools greater flexibility to tailor learning to their learners' needs, the new programmes of study have less prescribed subject content. Pupils will still be taught essential subject knowledge. However, the new curriculum balances subject knowledge with the key concepts and processes that underlie the discipline of each subject.

The revised programmes of study share a common format:

- importance statements tell why the subject matters and how it can contribute to the aims
- key concepts identify the big ideas that underpin the subject
- key processes identify the essential skills of the subject
- range and content outline the breadth of subject matter from which teachers should draw to develop knowledge, concepts and skills
- curriculum opportunities identify opportunities to enhance and enrich learning, including making links to the wider curriculum.

The structure of the revised programmes of study can be used to plan a coherent approach to subjects. Schools and colleges find it helpful to start by:

- identifying one or more of the key concepts to focus on when planning
- identifying which key processes offer opportunities to explore and extend the concept
- select the most appropriate contexts, content or purposes from the range and content section

- use experiences from the curriculum opportunities section to bring teaching and learning to life.

This common format to the new programmes of study contributes to greater coherence, making it easier to see links between subjects.

QCA created a new website for the national curriculum (curriculum.qca.org.uk). It provides information, guidance, resources and support for schools as they begin the implementation phase. The website incorporates interactive resources to support whole curriculum design and planning. Curriculum and subject leaders already lead the way in purposeful change, trialling new approaches, redesigning their curriculum and rethinking assessment to make a difference to learners.

Particularly at key stage 3, many schools built on their existing subject-focused strengths to develop other aspects of the curriculum by focusing on the aims of the curriculum, the cross-curriculum dimensions and on PLTS. Schools need to implement ideas about curriculum design systematically, linking subjects, dimensions and skills, and making the most of assessment. They need to think about how to do this throughout the entire planned learning experience – lessons, events, routines, extended hours, out-of-school learning, locations and environment – and through the qualifications provided, including new GCEs, GCSEs and Diplomas.

It remains important that young people develop as critical spectators, participants and creators of the cultural world around them. To do so, they need a rich range of experiences that motivate, engage and inspire. QCA is exploring what makes learning compelling, developing guidance and support for teachers, curriculum planners, advisers and others who support young people in their learning. This guidance will be useful for schools and other learning environments such as galleries, museums and activity centres. A compelling learning experience is a real and relevant context for learning through which young people recognise for themselves the importance of learning to their lives, both now and in the future. Learning becomes compelling when young people take an active engagement with and responsibility for their own learning, increasing the impact and potential for future development.

QCA designed the new secondary curriculum to enable schools to raise standards, and to help learners thrive in our fast-changing world. It is essential to build upon aspects of the new secondary curriculum that not only support learning within the school day, but also in extended schools, activities offered by a range of providers in formal and informal settings, and experiences initiated by young people themselves. These might include:

- theatre and dance performances
- national and local exhibitions, galleries, and museums
- heritage sites and other significant local buildings
- local libraries and archive services.

The new secondary curriculum aims to create successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. To realise this aim, we need to find ways of bringing cultural experiences to life. We want all young people to be switched on to learning and to recognise the value of cultural experiences enriching their lives.

Learning experiences, such as the ones described above, become compelling when they enable learners to:

- engage with and commit to their cultural learning
- develop a wide range of PLTS
- recognise the relevance and value of cultural education to their lives
- make the most of their opportunities for cultural learning
- have high aspirations.

Teachers and school leaders provided examples of the learning experiences they have created to make learning compelling for their pupils. They have certain common characteristics. To successfully integrate a compelling learning experience into the curriculum, the following factors should be considered:

- match time allocation to learning need (for example short, frequent and regular intervals for skill development; longer periods of time for deeper and more immersive learning)
- involve the right people (use experts from within and outside the school community)
- put learning in the right setting (plan for learning opportunities, both in the classroom and outside it)
- choose the right approaches to teaching and learning (achieve balance between instructional and active approaches)
- set clear quality criteria and consider how to identify the impact of the compelling learning experience on standards
- recognise where relevant connections can be made with other aspects of the curriculum (either in other subjects, cross-curricular dimensions or PLTS).

You can only evaluate the impact of a compelling cultural learning experience if you are clear about both expectations and learning outcomes from the outset. In doing so, be aware of both attainment and personal achievement, as well as personal development and the wide range of PLTS gained through such experiences. To evaluate the impact effectively, you should establish what knowledge and skills learners already possess. During the experience, observe and collect evidence of success from a wide range of sources appropriate to the context. Learners are one of the most valuable sources of information, both in relation to themselves and others. Communication with parents and other adults involved is also crucial, as their work can have a significant impact. At the end of the experience, ask all those involved to share their views, remembering to focus your questions on the learning outcomes. Finally, consider how your findings could inform future experiences

to make a positive difference to the cultural lives of young people, both in your school and in the wider community.

In partnership with practitioners and curriculum experts, QCA developed an approach to curriculum design based upon three key questions:

- what are we trying to achieve?
- how do we organise learning?
- how well are we achieving our aims?

These questions underpin both the national curriculum and other websites.

They represent an excellent starting point for planning opportunities in museums from worksheets to compelling learning experiences. QCA is working in partnership with organisations such as GEM to capture and disseminate approaches.

Let us know how you make learning irresistible to help develop successful, confident and responsible learners, like the one I met recently who said 'I didn't understand anything before I came to my new school; now I understand things I have not been taught yet.'

The child who wrote the extract at the beginning of this article is James Barnes. He is now the curator of museums in West Cumbria. If you look at YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lrm2M3YkgX4>), you can see him as he plays the xylophone that he tried to make a tune from all those years ago. Who says learning outside the classroom doesn't contribute to lifelong learning?