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Heritage as a resource for learning
Opportunities and challenges

It is clear that heritage provides ample opportunities to contribute to the learning of history in a meaningful and positive way. Material and immaterial heritage can easily trigger curiosity, and authentic objects and sites can foster empathy and support pupils' imagination of what it was like in the past. In heritage lessons, pupils can also engage in historical enquiry. Exploring historical evidence, reflecting on aspects of change and continuity, or critically questioning historical representations by using heritage may contribute to pupils' historical thinking and reasoning. In this way, heritage can be considered a powerful resource that engages pupils with the past and enhances the learning of history.

Another, more unique way in which engagement with the past through heritage might contribute to the learning of history is by encouraging reflection on the significance of the past for people in the present. Pupils can gain a better understanding of how different people connect in various ways to the past, what they might have in common, or establish a personal connection.

We have also pointed out the potential constraints of imaginative engagement and the construction of proximity, however. They may encourage presentist thinking and obstruct historical understanding. When pupils are emotionally engaged, it is, for example, more difficult to acknowledge other perspectives. Moreover, when heritage is considered to have a static, essentialist meaning that is bound to one static identity, it is likely to promote exclusion. In a dynamic approach, heritage can have multiple meanings and belong or connect to different identities.

A careful design of heritage lessons and integration into the curriculum is needed to materialise potential affordances, but also to resolve constraints and avoid some pitfalls. There are two main challenges.

The first challenge for teachers and heritage educators is to construct a meaningful balance between historical distance and proximity. For example, there should be enough opportunity to construct an historical context and to include perspectives from various historical actors. Representations and interpretations of the past must also be questioned. All this also requires a balance between the cognitive and emotional.

The second challenge lies in the design of heritage educational materials and activities that reflect a dynamic approach to heritage. The heritage narratives that are communicated to pupils should not be closed, but open texts, reflecting different voices, for example, on the meaning of certain heritage. Multiperspectivity and inclusiveness can also be achieved through activities in which pupils are supported and encouraged to explicitate, share and reflect on their prior knowledge, interest and experiences, especially when there are a variety of 'entrance narratives'. If we take the idea of pupils as meaning-makers seriously and want an inclusive approach, then our heritage lessons should provide pupils with opportunities to explore different perspectives on the significance of heritage. Reflecting on different interpretations and beliefs may contribute to pupils' awareness that their own and other people's identity influences their interpretations of the past. We should be careful, however,

to prevent the desire to consider cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in classrooms from resulting in fixed and sterotypical images of what that diversity amounts to.

The notions of historical distance, multiperspectivity and significance are important for a dynamic approach to heritage. Being aware of them may support professionals in the field of education in the design and evaluation of heritage education. The affordances and constraints will be different for each lesson or project in which heritage is used as a primary resource for learning. The practice of heritage education shows that in heritage lessons outside school, for example in a museum or at a heritage site, it is possible to construct a balance between historical distance and proximity, to open up multiple perspectives and to discuss significance. However, in contexts outside school it may be difficult to contextualise in depth, to respond to all the questions that are triggerd by heritage objects, and to engage pupils in sharing and discussing knowledge and feelings. That is why teachers and educators should carefully embed the use of heritage in their lessons and educational material, instead of 'doing' heritage on the side when the opportunity arises.

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