A simple step-by-step process for creating education resources from archive records

In our Archives Across The Curriculum and Creating Resources workshops we explored this simple process for creating an education activity from archive records. The process is best undertaken with another person or a small group working together because discussion and speculation often helps good ideas develop quickly.

The process has been developed specifically for the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence but it can be equally effective when developing materials for other curricular environments.

Step 1: Choose the right records
Step 2: Identify what is interesting about your chosen record
Step 3: Choose a curricular area to develop in more depth
Step 4: Create three simple activities that explore what's interesting about the records
Step 5: Create a narrative to link the activities together
Step 6: Devise an engaging starting point
Step 7: Create a finishing activity that allows for practice and points to further possibilities

Step 1: Choose the right records
Some archive records are fascinating to us and others are dull. However their educational potential may be distinct from these personal preferences. Records with potential might have one or more of the following qualities:

- a mystery to be solved
- an intriguing person
- connection to a famous event
- the bizarre
- a narrative
- local interest (place, people, event, activity, industry)

What else could give records educational potential ?

Step 2: Identify what is interesting about your chosen record

- Examine the record you've chosen from different curricular perspectives.
- What questions naturally arise about it ?
- What does it look and feel like ?
- Why was it kept and where is it housed ?
- What people, places and stories arise from it ?

Be wide-ranging and 'soft-focussed' about this. Jot down everything that occurs to you about the record, however random it seems

Create a ‘spider diagram’ from the record, exploring the points of interest under different curricular areas. At this stage it’s important to identify the history and literacy potential alongside other less obvious areas.

Step 3: Choose a curricular area to develop in more depth.
At this stage it’s useful to look at the Experiences and Outcomes within appropriate Curriculum for Excellence curricular areas to identify where potential for development lies.

Use the Education Scotland website http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk or the Curriculum for Excellence section of the Scottish Council on Archives website http://www.scottisharchives.org.uk to access the CfE documents.

Identify one or two Experiences and Outcomes that can be addressed with approaches you’ve identified in your spider diagram.

Curricular outcomes are not the only determinant of educational purpose, but they provide us with a guide and help us stay relevant to good practice in schools.

It’s important that archives-related education work keeps the business of archives as part of its focus. If a lesson achieves the outcome of raising students’ awareness of archives and adding to their understanding of the purpose and processes of archiving then it has achieved an essential educational outcome.

Step 4: Create three simple activities that explore what’s interesting about the records
A good lesson consists of a number of activities which are connected together with a narrative.

Educational activities should involve students in examining, questioning or speculating about information.

Each activity should be focussed on one aspect of learning. For example a close reading activity may contain questions which invite scanning the text for an answer, or discussing possible answers with others.

Three activities is sufficient, but you can go on to create as many as you like. More than six should be split into separate learning modules

Step 5: Create a narrative to link the activities together
A narrative might be a progression of acquired skills, a sequence of events, a revealing of information through investigation, the completion of a process.

Narrative is essential to students’ engagement with learning experiences, and the retention of skills and knowledge acquired.

Step 6: Decide how to start
This is the point where you choose how to introduce students to your series of activities.

Just like a good book, your lesson needs to draw them in at the start.

Good beginnings can involve

- a mystery or a puzzle to solve
- shock or surprise
- inviting them to help or to go on a journey
- introducing an intriguing character

What else ?

Step 7: Decide how to end
To decide how your lesson ends you must first be clear about what you intend your students to learn

Revisit the Experiences and Outcomes, the records and the activities.

- Do they fit together ?
- Is there a narrative ?
- Is the narrative clear ?

The closing activity should incorporate

- revision of what has been learned
- creation of a record (this could be a remembered experience, an image, writing, speech, film, performance, web content, or anything else which expresses the students' learning)
- opportunities for further investigation