

Methodology for Historic Environment Education

Historic Environment Education uses local resources to teach about the past. Nearby historic sites and buildings, local people, and the environment that surrounds a community all contribute to this innovative method for learning. HEE is interdisciplinary, combining archeology, education, environmental studies, geography, history, math, museum studies, science, social studies, and theater. These diverse fields contribute to engage learners and community people in the local past, and from there, the broader context and the wider scope of history and science are made.

Participants in HEE could be any community member, including learners, adults, and the elderly. School classes use HEE to make history come alive in their classrooms and at local heritage sites and adults (including the elderly) join in to recreate the past through research, study groups, oral history, historic preservation, living history, and time travels. Researching and reliving the past and then reflecting about the experience brings knowledge and understanding to the participant. It is about “Bildning,” to make people, young and old, grow and take responsibilities in their own lives and communities by using experiences, good and bad, from the past.

An important focus in a HEE event is reflection. By stepping in the shoes of another person, participants can reflect on how the important questions of today connect with the past. Participants have a chance to discuss today’s issues in a historical context to find solutions for the future. People even have a dialogue with themselves and with the past to get an in-depth learning involving all the senses. HEE provides an opportunity for directly experiencing the past and reflecting on what that means for themselves and the community today.

Community development and social cohesion are important components of HEE. Using this method, people in the communities, from different traditions, get together in study groups with a common goal to develop individuals, build communities, and even address national issues. HEE uses historical sites and the “forgotten” stories embedded in the landscape to allow participants to reflect on their lives and communities. In addition to identity creation, HEE improves democracy through understanding, healing and reconciliation in the often divided societies of today. Through Bridging Ages activities in South Africa, Nicaragua, Uganda, Turkey and even Sweden, people seek resolution of conflicts through recreation of past troubles. Getting diverse peoples together to look at their collective pasts assists in building community.

The pedagogical basis of HEE evolves from several theories. Vygotsky (1978) maintained the child follows the adult's example and gradually develops the ability to do certain tasks without help or assistance. He called the difference between what a child or an adult can do with help and what he or she can do without guidance the "zone of proximal development." HEE maintains that the local environment is a “zone of current development” (ZCD) that participants (young learners as well as adults) use as a basis to expand their knowledge.

Vygotsky also discussed the importance of play for child development: "Action according to rules begins to be determined by ideas, not by objects.... It is terribly difficult for a child to sever thought (the meaning of a word) from object. Play is a transitional stage in this direction." Vygotsky (1978). Susan Linn also commented on the importance of play. Children need play and make believe to "learn how to enjoy or even approach challenges that call for imagination, experimentation, inventiveness, or creative problem-solving...." She continues: "The skills children acquire in creative play—like problem solving, cooperation, empathy, and divergent thinking—are essential for people living in a democracy." Linn (2008)

A strength of HEE is that it expands this concept of play out of the playground and into older groups, including adults and the elderly. Many HEE activities provide an opportunity for cross-generational interaction as well. Play is an important part of living for everyone—young and old-- and HEE combines it with education and learning for all age groups.

Historic Environment Education uses local resources to teach about the past. The local environment offers ample opportunities to learn about the local pasts and then expand into more regional, national, and international contexts. Additionally, HEE allows learners and adults to learn through action and experience.

Another pedagogical aspect of Time Traveling involves experienced history and multiple intelligences. Not everyone learns in the same ways, and not all students learn effectively through readings and lectures. People who gain a direct experience of how people lived in the past gain a better knowledge of history. Making a fire with flint and steel, grinding dried corn kernels by hand and then cooking corn flour tortillas over a cow dung fire, or washing clothes with soap made from yucca roots shows participants how living in the Spanish Colonial period was difficult. Through a direct experience of history, people are engaged on multiple levels—through their senses as well as their intellectual curiosity.

Methodology for Time Travels

Time Travels combine education with rigorous historical research and play acting. The goal is to provide an experienced history event to make history come alive for the participants. The following seven steps guide those who conduct Time Travels

1. Choose a suitable historic environment or site nearby.
2. Conduct background research at universities and museums by community members and learners, who research archives and libraries about the time period, conduct oral histories while keeping a regional and national perspective in mind. Sources can include written documents, maps, findings, literature, and oral sources.
3. Interpret the landscape surrounding the chosen historic environment or site.
4. Training days combine all who are interested in local history with the necessary competence skills. This will result in knowledge of history as well as the development of pedagogical and practical skills. This also is of great importance for the commitment, interest, and reflection of all participants.

5. Teaching participants and learners in preparation of a Time Travel is thematic and embraces many subjects in school. Questions about the specific past are posed and learners search for answers to their questions in archives and other sources of information. The more subjects that are incorporated, the better the overall view participants will get of everyday life.
6. The Time Travel itself. A Time Travel experience at a historical site can play an important part in consolidating knowledge. Participants role-play those historical persons they have studied. A certain point in time is frozen and you join in some of the activities that took place on that specific site. The key questions connect the past and today. When done properly, a Time Travel is a powerful tool which gives participants a profound experience and lasting knowledge.
7. Evaluation is important to consolidate the Time Travel experience and the thematic study in historic environment education.

In a Time Travel, people's values and ideas are challenged so that they reflect on their lives and values while they dialogue with others, connecting today with the past.

Using this guide, teachers, museum educators, and community scholars have conducted Time Travels for more than 120,000 learners and community members over the last twenty-five years in twelve countries. Just a few of the comments by learners after the Time Travels illustrate their effectiveness. From learners, they comment: "This was probably the best and most knowledgeable way of teaching I've ever had at school. And I've never had so much fun working before. That's probably why I remember so much." (Student 15 years old in Mariehamn, Åland); *"I must say I learned ten times more this very day about life of a family a hundred years ago, than I've learnt from ten lessons of meaningless talking in school."* (Student, 15 years, from Öland, Sweden); "When the time-travel was about to end, I didn't want to leave my other ego (Anni Blom) behind me, so I took a part of her and brought it in to me. A Little bit of Anni will always keep on living inside me and I hope that I will keep on living inside someone else in the future." (*student at Ålands high school in Mariehamn after a Time Travel to 1905*). A Swedish teacher observed: "Now for the first time I believe my students realize that ancient history isn't just a fairytale." (from Trekanten school, Sweden). From New Mexico, teachers made these comments: "Absolutely the best trip we've taken.... This was a most valuable experience," "This was an extraordinary and awesome experience.... Knowing how to incorporate history into such a meaningful experience is the key to educating our Middle School students!" From Port Shepstone, South Africa, learners in Grade 9, after the Time Travels to 1905 said: "I learnt to speak freely and encourage myself to stand up for what's right and what I believe in." "I learnt that fighting does not solve problems but causes more problems than solutions." "I will never forget this Time Travel, even if I try." "Make Time Travel available to everyone." "I learnt to respect other race groups." Also in South Africa, from Time Travels to 1853 at Bain's Kloof Pass: "I have a lot more self-confidence after the Time Travel." Finally from Iingcinga Zethu Secondary School in South Africa, a learner remarked: "I used to have a negative attitude towards history that changed from the moment I became involved in Time Travel."

Conclusion

Historic Environment Education contributes to community development and social cohesion and makes a greater impact on the participants, whether they be young learners, adults, and even the elderly. Integrating the historical environment into people's own experience through community studies, oral history and time traveling is a way towards social cohesion and developing the community by using experiences from the past. Doing a HEE activity, including research a Time Travel, stays with participants longer than reading a textbook or hearing about it from lectures. Historic Environment Education allows the elderly, adults, teenagers, and children an opportunity to preserve and develop their own heritage in the community. By recreating the customs and life ways of their ancestors, participants keep the heritage from the past alive. In the end, this contributes to the development of the community, social cohesion and to a better understanding of democracy, integration, reconciliation, and nation building.

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