

## Museums in the classroom

**Source: Anra Kennedy**

### The project

In 2003 staff at Gamesley Early Excellence Centre in Glossop, Derbyshire used the *Museums in the classroom* pack as the basis for a six-week long project with their three- and four-year-old pupils. They created a dinosaur museum in their school.

The school museum was so successful that they were commended in the annual 'Museum in the classroom' awards. The judges were particularly impressed by the way in which teachers, children and parents worked together, the use of new media, the close ties to a real museum and a real museum website, and the fun the children obviously had taking part in the project. This is an excellent example of best practice.

I'm very grateful to Julie Meaton, the teacher who oversaw the Gamesley Centre's Dinosaur museum project for sharing her experiences with us for this case study.



### A teacher's view of the project

*How did you decide upon your school museum's theme, and were the children involved in this decision?*

We plan our curriculum on a 2-yearly cycle, and this particular half term the theme was dinosaurs. We wanted a 'hands on' way for the children to explore this fascinating era and thus decided on a museum. The children were involved in deciding what to put in the museum, stimulated by a visit to a real museum.

*Did your project involve any visits to or contact with museums? If so, was this a positive and helpful experience?*

As part of our work on dinosaurs we took groups of children to the museum in Manchester. The visit acted as a stimulus to enable us to set up our own museum in the nursery, where children could explore and develop their knowledge and understanding of dinosaurs. We recorded the visit using a camcorder and this was shown to children at group times to recall the event. The visit to the museum was a fantastic way to stimulate and enhance our work on museums and dinosaurs.

*Did you use the Internet at all in the course of the project? If so, what for and was this useful?*

The Natural History Museum in London had a wonderful Internet site where children could access drawings of dinosaurs in their natural habitats, models, skeletons, fossils, plants and eggs.

We used this site for resources, information and as a week-long workshop session for children and parents on 'surfing the net' to find out more about dinosaurs.

*Please outline the physical outcomes or products of the project, i.e. any resources, displays, exhibits etc. produced.*

- In order to put the dinosaurs in context we replicated the environments in which they lived and created our own dinosaur landscapes.
- Children learned that dinosaurs hatched from eggs and that dinosaurs laid eggs in nests on the ground – we made our own papier mache eggs.
- We made dinosaur ‘fossils and footprints’ using clay and plaster of Paris.
- We made an area where children could hunt or search for ‘dinosaurs’ and ‘dinosaur bones’ using a metal detector!
- We developed our own computer screens for children to use in order to build up their knowledge of dinosaurs.
- Displays were set up of dinosaur models – toys and wooden ones.
- We set up a gift shop selling pencils, postcards, rubber dinosaurs etc.
- We ensured that a wide variety of factual information was displayed in the museum.
- Children and parents filled in dinosaur questionnaires, finding the answers in our museum.



*Please outline any benefits – positive social or educational outcomes – that arose from this project, for the children in your school.*

The whole project fulfilled positive social and educational targets. Our aims in creating the dinosaur museum were to provide a medium through which the children could learn about dinosaurs in a fun, stimulating and interactive way. The museum also provided a vehicle through which we could deliver many of the early learning goals from the Foundation Stage curriculum. Finally, the museum enabled us to introduce children and parents to the idea that museums can be a fun and interesting way in which to spend time together.

We held a variety of workshop sessions that took place throughout the duration of the museum project. These ensured that there was always something new and fresh to discover about dinosaurs and this helped to maintain the interest of parents and children.

Many activities that took place encouraged children to play co-operatively and to engage in problem-solving tasks.

*Do you feel this project impacted upon your own or your colleagues' skills or professional development in any way? Please give an example.*

Staff developed their own knowledge, not only about dinosaurs and the world they inhabited, but also about museums and the educational role they can play, not only in the lives of children but also of their families.

It gave colleagues an excellent example of how all areas of the early stage curriculum can be taught and covered by our work with children in the museum.

*Were parents involved in the project at all? If so, in what way?*

- Parents came with us on the museum visits.
- Parents were invited to our weekly workshop activities, where we created a dinosaur landscape, made eggs, reconstructed a dinosaur using wooden puzzles, made dinosaur footprints and fossils, and hunted for dinosaur bones using a metal detector.
- Parents visited the school museum and we surfed the net together.
- We encouraged parents to fill in the questionnaire and fact sheet with their child as they visited the museum.

*Would you recommend the use of the Museum in the classroom pack to other teaching professionals?*

Yes. We incorporated many ideas suggested in the pack, but felt that we had to adapt those ideas to suit our very young children.

*Please add any other comments you'd like to make.*

We used the project to 'bring the past into the present with ICT'.

Producing the dinosaur museum and incorporating lots of ICT into it gave the whole project life and brought new ways of stimulating interest, thus helping the children attain an understanding of these creatures from bygone days.

The ICT equipment we used was: camcorder, digital camera, metal detector, TV/video, computer, multi-link tape recorders, electronic till and bar-code scanner, pixie (electronic remote control toy) and an overhead projector.

### **Further information**

The pack is produced by the Campaign for Museums and is available free. You can read or download it online at [www.campaignformuseums.org.uk](http://www.campaignformuseums.org.uk) or order a booklet by post from the address below. Please send a strong envelope, at least A4 size, self-addressed, and stamped with a minimum of 69 pence.

Museum in the Classroom, The Campaign for Museums, PO Box 9995,  
London SW1W 0BP

### **Images**

'Shop' shows a child in the class museum's gift shop, ringing through a sale. Courtesy of Gamesley Early Excellence Centre, Glossop.

'Pterodactyl' shows a drawing by Luke of a pterodactyl, drawn in response to the project. Also courtesy of Gamesley Early Excellence Centre, Glossop.